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# You are D. B. Cooper

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You Are D. B. Cooper

by

James Bezerra

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Creative Writing

Thesis Committee:  
Gabriel Urza, Chair  
Paul Collins  
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## Abstract

This thesis is a novel about the 1971 skyjacking of a plane out of Portland Airport. The novel is structured in the style of a choose-your-own-adventure book. It investigates the nature and identity of the skyjacker, who is known as D. B. Cooper.

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You Are D. B. Cooper

By

James Bezerra

Look, it is not going to work out between us. Please set this book on fire.

I only know a few true things about D. B. Cooper:

In 1971 a plane was hijacked after taking off from Portland Airport.

The hijacker demanded a \$200,000 ransom and it was given to him when the plane landed at Seattle Airport.

In the air again, somewhere between Seattle and Reno, the hijacker disappeared completely.

The hijacker became known as “D. B. Cooper” even though he’d never used that name. He was never captured, identified, or heard from again.

It is the only unsolved skyjacking in American history.<sup>1</sup>

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1

But first wait, let’s talk about you → pg 43



There are only two types of bombs: exploded bombs and unexploded bombs.

Exploded bombs are not really even bombs anymore. An exploded bomb has become a bombing. It has left its bomb state and become a moment, then an event, then a series of events.

A bomb is simply a container filled with explosives and other various materials, but it is different than simply a container which is filled with those materials. A crate of dynamite is not a bomb, it is a crate filled with dynamite. Dynamite can be set on fire without causing it to explode.

A crate filled with dynamite, fitted with blasting caps, and connected to a length of cannon fuse or detonating cord, is a bomb.

A bomb is made of its potentiality.

The force of an explosion is measured in terms of its kinetic and potential energies. The energy release of one stick of dynamite is calculated at  $2 \times 10^6 J$ . This same formula is used to measure all forms of energy release.

The energy release of a moderately sized asteroid colliding with the planet Earth is calculated at  $3 \times 10^{20} J$ . The  $J$  represents the energy of one Joule. Named for James P. Joule, who measured the mechanical equivalent of heat, 4.18 Joules is equivalent to one calorie burned in the human body. The body will burn one calorie simply by sitting in an airplane seat for an hour and existing. D. B. Cooper existed for about 6 hours.

And in 1971 dynamite sticks were packaged in paraffin-sealed paper that was brown, like pale leather. <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>

Take me back to the plane → pg 18

Pretty please??<sup>3</sup>

---

3

Fine → pg 66

No → pg 8

Are you sure?<sup>4</sup>

---

4

Yes → pg 9

No → pg 50

Why not? It will be fun!<sup>5</sup>

---

5

Okay → pg 66

No → pg 5

Come on man, *be cool*.<sup>6</sup>

---

6

Okay → pg 66

No → pg 10

Are you sure?<sup>7</sup>

---

7

Yes → pg 50

No → pg 6

He existed, the man who bought a one-way ticket with cash at Portland Airport on the afternoon of 24 November 1971 — who was the 36th passenger to board Flight 305 to Seattle-Tacoma Airport, who sat in seat 18C, who carried with him only a black attache case, and whose FBI file is now more than sixty volumes long — most certainly existed.

He gave his name at the Northwest Orient Airlines counter as ‘Dan Cooper’.

Later that night, a young reporter named Clyde Jabin, rushing to file his story on the hijacking, huddled into a phone booth in the rain, begging information from an FBI file clerk.

“D. Cooper,” the clerk had said.

“Is that ‘D’ as in dog? Or ‘B’ as in boy?” Jabin asked.

“Yeah, that’s right,” the clerk said back in a hurry. “Look, I gotta go Clyde.”

Jabin’s story identified the hijacker as “D. B. Cooper”.

At about 8:13pm on the night of the 24th, the fictitious “D. B. Cooper” of Jabin’s story leapt from the aft stairway of the Boeing 727 as it passed over the Lewis River in southwestern Washington. That is the last true thing known about him.<sup>8</sup>

---

8

Didn’t he have a bomb? How’d he get a bomb on a plane? What is going on?→ pg 16  
I didn’t eat before I started reading this. Can we talk about tater tots or something? → pg 11

McMenamin's Cajun Tots are the best, right?!<sup>9</sup>

---

9

Fuck yeah! → pg 13

I do not consume gluten → pg 2



## THE CANADIAN

The man who would be DB might have been born in 1926 in Vancouver, Canada. His father could have been a fisherman, tall with thick arms, and a big beard that hung heavy from his otherwise thin face. DB could have stood at the end of the dock each time his dad's sixty-foot salmon trawler put out in the direction of Vancouver Island. DB might have waited there every time watching as the boat disappeared around a bend in the channel on its way out to the sea; such a very small boat when compared to the vastness of such a dark sea. As a little Canadian boy he might have read the Belgian comic book *Les Aventures de Dan Cooper* about the adventures of a Royal Canadian Air Force test pilot named Dan Cooper. The comic was popular in Canada but was never sold in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

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10

This sounds like our guy, I'm convinced. Now tell me about his jump → pg 41  
Canadians do not commit interesting crimes. Who else have you got? → pg 46

Cool.

Now let's talk about D. B. Cooper.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>

Yeah, okay → pg 43

## THE PERFECT SUSPECT

The man who would be DB would have had to have an intimate working knowledge of the Boeing 727-100. It was the only commercial passenger aircraft in wide use in 1971 which had a built-in airstair. In order to accommodate the stairway, Boeing engineers had configured the three jet engines higher up than they would have ordinarily. A result of that arrangement — DB would have known — was a relatively calm and cool spot of slipstream below and behind the tail of the aircraft. A sweet spot where a person leaping from the airstair while in-flight would not be incinerated by the jet wash, as would have happened otherwise.

It was for exactly this reason that the Central Intelligence Agency had, for years, been using the 727 for low-level airdrops into Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Few other jet aircraft of its size and cargo capacity were capable of flying below radar at 10,000 feet and at a speed of only 200 miles per hour.

In 1971 it was not widely known that the airstair could be deployed while the plane was in-flight. Most of the aircraft crews themselves did not know this; the fact had never been incorporated into any commercial airline training, as there was no foreseeable situation in which the crew would need to deploy the stairway while in-flight.

A cargo specialist working for Air America - the CIA's private, clandestine airline in Asia - would have known that the stairway was controlled by a master switch that could not be overridden from the cockpit. A Green Beret waiting to jump into a wide dark night over Laotian jungle might have noticed that the stairway could be deployed in-flight with just the flip of a single switch. A hollow-eyed member of the Phoenix

Program's capture/kill unit might have known that the 727 could both takeoff and land with the aftstair deployed.

Air America was dissolved on 30 June 1976 following allegations that its operatives had been involved in opium and heroin smuggling operations run by the Laotian army. A man with connections to the Southeast Asian drug trade might have known people who could help him launder \$200,000 dollars of cash that the FBI was actively on the lookout for.

Following the dissolution of Air America, the fleet of aircraft was sold off. The Argentine Navy — through avenues provided to it through the CIA's Operation Condor Program — purchased three 727s a year before their state security services began disappearing people by throwing them out of airplanes over the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>

This all makes sense. Tell me more about somebody like this! → pg 36  
That doesn't sound right to me, let's go back to the suspects → pg 46

What was going on:

**2:31 pm** : Cooper boards the plane. He is wearing a nondescript dark suit with an out-of-fashion skinny black tie and a mother-of-pearl tie pin.

**2:50 pm** : Flight 305 takes off on schedule from Portland Airport on route to Seattle. Flight time is estimated to be 36 minutes. “It’s only a milk run,” pilot Captain William Scott described the route later.

**2:58 pm** : The man in seat 18C passes a note to flight attendant Florence Schaffner, who is seated near him in a jump seat attached to the door leading to the aft stairway. She’s used to being hit on in the tight pressurized body of the Boeing 727. She takes the note, smiles a practiced smile that drives the color from her lips and drops the note into her purse. She is used to these notes from drunk business men. The man — white, maybe forty-five, about six feet, with widow’s peaks and a calm quality that somehow isn’t soothing — leans toward her and says, “Miss, you’d better look at that note. I have a bomb.”<sup>13</sup>

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13

Then what happened? → pg 18  
I would like information concerning skyjackings → pg 61

**2:59 pm** : For a very long moment Florence does nothing but look at him as he leans back into his seat while watching her. She reaches into her purse and digs for the note. She finds it and unfolds it. The handwriting is very neat. It is all capital letters written in a felt-tipped pen. The note reads: *I HAVE A BOMB IN MY BRIEFCASE. I WILL USE IT IF NECESSARY. I WANT YOU TO SIT NEXT TO ME. YOU ARE BEING HIJACKED.*

Florence unbuckles herself and slips into the empty seat next to him. “Can I see it?” she asks. He unlatches his attache case and opens it a few inches. Florence sees that inside of it there are four red cylinders on top of four red cylinders, all connected with insulated red wires, all of which connect to a battery. She realizes she has no idea what a bomb actually looks like. She just nods her head and he closes the case. “Here is what I want: \$200,000 negotiable American currency, four parachutes — two primary and two reserve — and a fuel truck waiting on the ground in Seattle when we land.” Florence nods, unsure of what to say. She whispers something about needing to tell the Captain and starts to stand. “Oh,” he says, raising his hand toward her but not touching her, “I would also like a bourbon and water.”<sup>14</sup>

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14

What happened next? → pg 18

Tell me more about bombs → pg 4

**3:07 pm** : Captain Scott radios Seattle-Tacoma Airport air traffic control to advise them of the hijacking in progress.

**3:18 pm** : The phone rings on the desk of Donald Nyrop, President of Northwest Orient Airlines. He immediately authorizes payment and orders complete cooperation. The company has a \$250,000 insurance policy against air piracy.

**3:26 pm** : Captain Scott's voice crackles over the intercom into the main cabin, "Hi there folks, this is, uh, your Captain speaking. Due to a minor mechanical problem, our arrival into Seattle-Tacoma is going to be delayed. It's nothing to worry about and I'll keep you apprised of our updated arrival time."

**3:45 pm** : FBI Special Agent Ralph Himmelsbach is at home with his family in Portland when he gets the call. He stands in his kitchen looking out the window into the rain as he listens. Finally he says, "Okay, I'm on my way." With his finger he clicks the phone off. Then he dials from memory, calling his counterpart in Seattle. "You're going to need to round up two hundred thousand dollars," he says. Himmelsbach will spend the rest of his career working the Cooper case.

**4:06 pm** : FBI agents from the Seattle office have to go to six banks. They try to limit the collection of bills to serial numbers beginning *L* from the 1969-C series. In the Seattle field office, all 10,000 bills are photographed by a high-speed microfilm camera.

**4:28 pm** : Seattle police make Earl Cossey, who packs parachutes at a local skydiving school, give them four parachutes. The parachutes are thrown like criminals into the rear seats of two squad cars. Lights and sirens blazing in the wet afternoon, the police race toward the airport.

**4:58 pm** : As Flight 305 circles over Puget Sound, stewardess Tina Mucklow brings Cooper another drink. She's twenty-two and this is her first real job and she doesn't like the new short-skirted red uniforms the airline makes them wear. He is looking out the window when she approaches him. He knows that she is there but doesn't look at her right away. "I think that's McChord Air Force Base down there," he muses absently. "Your drink ..." Tina holds it out to him. Cooper looks at her, he is wearing dark glasses now. He holds a twenty dollar bill out to her, tells her to keep the change. "No tipping allowed," she says. Tina will briefly become a minor celebrity because of her time with him that night. In later life she would change her name and join a nunnery.

**5:24 pm** : Tina approaches him again, she leans down near his ear and tells him that the money, parachutes, and fuel are waiting for them on the ground. "Okay," he says, "let's get this show on the road."<sup>15</sup>

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15

Did he get the money? → pg 20

Tina is interesting, tell me more about her → pg 33



**5:39 pm** : The plane touches down on the tarmac at Seattle-Tacoma Airport. Through Tina, Cooper tells Captain Scott to taxi out to the edge of the runway, which is brightly lit and from which he can view all of the approaches. He asks that the cabin lights be turned off, in case police snipers are nearby. Northwest Orient Airlines Seattle manager of operations Al Lee very carefully approaches the plane. He carries a canvas bag which is literally filled with cash. It is twelve inches by twelve inches by eight inches, it weighs twenty-five pounds and is filled with 100 bundles of twenty dollars bills. Each bundle is \$2,000. He passes the bag up the stairway to Tina along with the parachutes. It has been a very long day for Al Lee.

**6:12 pm** : Refueling begins. Cooper inspects the cash and parachutes. He gives the OK to release the passengers who, though frustrated, never knew they were hostages. “The two of you can go as well,” he points to Florence and the third stewardess, Alice Hancock.

**7:20 pm** : He beckons Tina over and pats the seat next to him. She sits. He gives her instructions to pass on to the pilots. She listens and nods like a waitress who doesn’t need to write anything down.

**7:27 pm** : Tina goes into the cockpit and repeats it all.

“He actually said that?” Captain Scott asks her.

“What?” She asks back.

“He said ‘Flight path Victor 23’?”

Tina shrugs, “Yeah. From here to Reno, he said. What?”

Scott looks to his copilot Bob Rataczak and then back at Tina, “The flightpath is called *Vector 23*. ‘Victor 23’ is just what pilots say to each other.”

**7:36 pm** : Takeoff. Captain Scott takes Flight 305 up to 10,000 feet, per instruction. The landing gear remains locked in the takeoff position, per instruction. The flaps are set to 15 degrees, per instruction. Tina peers out the nearest window and swallows hard. She didn't know that jets could fly so slowly.<sup>16</sup>

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16

Then did he jump? → pg 22

I have a hunch already, who are the suspects? → pg 46

**7:55 pm** : Cooper knocks back the rest of his drink. He tells Tina she should go up to the cockpit. While her hand is on the knob, she looks back and she is almost certain that he winks at her.

**8:00 pm** : An indicator light buzzes on, throwing an orange glow in the cockpit; the aftstair has been lowered.

**8:13 pm** : The tail of the plane experiences a sudden upward bounce and Scott has to trim the flaps to level the nose.

**10:15 pm** : Flight 305 touches down at Reno-Tahoe Airport to refuel. Tina calls back into the cabin, asking what his instructions are. He doesn't answer her, because he's no longer there.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>

Okay, who are the suspects? → pg 46  
Was there a search for him? → pg 48

## THE PARATROOPER

The man who would be DB may have joined the US Army Air Force in 1944. His name might have been Kenneth Christiansen. He may have joined the paratroopers because he'd heard they got extra hazard pay for each jump. The war may have ended by the time he was deployed to Japan in 1945, but he would have made occasional training jumps with the standard issue military parachute called the Navy Backpack 6, one of which — by complete coincidence — was handed up the stairway of Flight 305 while it sat on the Seattle tarmac more than two decades later. He may have been a man of small stature who enjoyed his deployment to Japan because the time he spent in what remained of their old pretty cities made him feel tall and being an American soldier in a country bankrupted by war made him feel rich. In 1954 he might have left the Army and applied for a job with Northwest Orient Airlines and been stationed at their small refueling base on Shemya Island in the Aleutians. It would have been a lonely time. The airbase had been leased by Northwest from the US Army, which had set up a weather station there during World War II and later built a 10,000 foot runway to accommodate bombers flying against the Japanese forces that overran Attu and Kiska in 1942. Shemya was a cold tip of black volcanic rock jutting out of the violent blue Bering Sea 1,200 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. It had a subpolar oceanic climate, so it is always cold, always wet, always windy. In the summers it might have gotten as warm as 50 degrees fahrenheit.

Christiansen would not have been happy during his five years there. He would have twice applied to be a flight attendant and been rejected twice. In the freezing 20-hour nights there on Shemya, he might have nursed an intense anger at the airline that

had sent him to the fringe of the world and only paid him \$512 a month. Eventually accepted as a flight attendant, he would have been trained on numerous Northwest aircraft, including the 727. He would have been forty-five when Flight 305 was hijacked out of Portland. Seven months after that he bought a house with cash in northern Oregon. Years later, following his deathbed confession, investigators found a hiding space in his attic - above his bed - that was just the right size to hide about \$200,000 in \$20 bills.<sup>18</sup>

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18

I'm sold, this was the guy! Tell me about his jump → pg 41  
No way! Give me somebody else → pg 46

The actual physical man who identified himself as Dan Cooper to the Northwest Orient Airlines ticketing agent in Portland and who hijacked Flight 305 would have found himself descending an unstable aft stairway in the middle of a thick thunderstorm, shooting through the night at 200 miles per hour. The ambient air temperature at 10,000 feet would have been 7 degrees fahrenheit below zero. With the wind chill it would have been 69 degrees fahrenheit below zero. Blood freezes in the body at 106 degrees fahrenheit below zero, or at roughly the temperature he would have experienced plummeting through that thick and cold and wet air.

If he survived the jump — the speed, the cold, the lightning and the rain — he would have drifted into the thick canopy of trees averaging 80 to 120 feet high. The nylon of his parachute would have become tangled in the branches. He most likely would have found himself hugging the trunk of a douglas fir in the midsts of a thrashing storm something like seventy feet off the ground. If he'd been able to precisely shrug off his parachute harness, he would have had to throw the bag of money to the ground so that he could then slowly shimmy down the sharp bark of the trunk while wearing a cheap and lightweight business suit. His loafers would have been blown off during his freefall, so he would be climbing down in wet white cotton socks.

If he survived the jump, survived the drop into the the trees, wasn't ripped open or impaled on thick branches, if he didn't slip, didn't fall on the way down, if he found himself standing on the forest floor and triumphantly picked up his canvas bag of cash, wet and heavy from the rain, he would have then found himself standing in the thickest old-growth forests still in existence in North America. He would have found himself standing in the cold wet dark amongst millennias' old trees which had stood silently by

while empires rose and flourished and died; trees whose births predated the science of geometry.

He would have stumbled his way through the forest, his clothes heavy and freezing stiff against his skin. No food, no shelter, no water. If he made it to a town, they would have already seen the news. If he made it to a freeway, they would have already been checkpointed by the county sheriffs.

If he survived the jump, survived the descent down the trees, survived the wet hike out of the woods, slipped past all of the people looking for him specifically, he would have eventually found himself at home with 10,000 wet \$20 bills, the serial numbers of which had all already been photographed by the FBI, rendering them unspendable.

He might, at that point, have wondered to himself what the point of all of it had been, but then — just then — he might have remembered that Jesse James actually even *died* ingloriously, but people still thought him a hero.<sup>19</sup>

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19

Now let's talk about the suspects → pg 46

You know, I'm not sure if I even care *who* did it, but tell me *how* he could have pulled it off → pg 27

It would have had to happen like this:

The man who would be DB would have met Tina Mucklow in a Portland bar sometime in early 1971. It might have been sometime around midnight. She was small-town-pretty and the kind of young when the disappointments of life were fresh.

Assuming the FBI sketches are accurate, he would have been in his early forties, with that fierce kind of calm a soldier gets when he comes home from hot climates that tried to kill him. He would have offered to buy her a drink. She would have had a beer, he would have had a bourbon and water. She would have made small talk about her job as a stewardess, might have complained about the new very short skirted red uniforms, “I didn’t sign up to be a cocktail waitress.”

He would have talked about how good it was to be back in the States, about how hard it had been to get a drink with ice in it in Southeast Asia.

“So I spend my life inside of planes,” Tina would have said, “and you have spent your life jumping out of them.”

“I’ll tell you a secret. Every time I jump, the moment before I do, I’m not sure if I can.”

“Every time?”

They would have ordered another round.

“I didn’t ask your name,” he would have said.

“Don’t be boring,” she would have replied. “Don’t tell me your name, tell me who you *are*.”

“I always wanted to be Jesse James.”

“He robbed trains, right?”



“He robbed a lot of things.”

“Do you want to rob me a train, Jesse James?”

They would have made plans.

She could have started paying closer attention to luggage; figuring out the largest carry-on bag that would fit in an overhead bin.

He could have done research, quietly tracking down the smallest civilian performance parachute he could buy with cash. She would have decided on the American Tourister Hard Shell, 1969, in brown. He might have chosen the Pioneer 26-foot Steerable ram-air conical chute.

Eventually they would have spent an entire autumn evening in his cheap apartment, rented with cash — and with a view of just a sliver of the Willamette River from the kitchen window — figuring out how to pack the Tourister with: his chute, a jumpsuit, boots, a topo map, a tiny survival kit, a 9mm Beretta, and duct tape. It would have been a tight fit.

Peering into his attache case Tina asked, “Do you think the bomb looks real enough?”

“It is real.”

“What do you mean it *is real*? You made a real bomb?”

“Yeah.”

“*Un*-make it.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Tina could have gotten the suitcase onto the plane.

He might have demanded parachutes along with the ransom money because he had spent most of the year thinking about the things that FBI agents would think about and intended as much misdirection as possible.

At 7:40 pm on 24 November 1971, as the almost empty plane lifted off from Seattle-Tacoma headed south toward Reno, they would have been alone together in the main cabin. They would have looked at each other just then.

Few people can ever know that feeling; of having a secret that big.

Love can feel that way, and often does, at the beginning, as though the act of being in love is a secret that only two people together can ever understand.

“Okay,” she would have said finally.

“Okay,” he would have agreed.

She would have pulled the Tourister from an overhead bin.

She would have helped him quickly duct tape the packets of money to his body before he zipped into the jumpsuit. She would have laced up his boots. He would have pulled on the chute. She would have set the Tourister, his attache case, and one of the reserve parachutes near the door to the aftstair, so that he wouldn’t forget to throw them out into the sky. He would have peered out one of the windows into the storm.

“I wasn’t expecting rain,” he might have said.

She might have kissed him suddenly, hard and long, before moving up toward the cockpit. When she put her hand on the knob, she would have looked back. He might have winked at her.<sup>20</sup>

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20

No way! Give me the real suspects → pg 46

I see what you’re doing, you’re trying to slip some kind of love story in here. What is that all about? → 31

ME: Sure, what are your questions?

YOU: Well, who are you?

ME: I'm your Narrator!

YOU: Yeah, I know how books work, but why are we talking?

ME: I'm going to be your guide. Think about it like you're Dante and I'm Virgil  
and I'm helping you on your investigation.

YOU: What's my investigation?

ME: The D. B. Cooper case, of course!

YOU: What do you know about it?

ME: Way too much. It's kind of been my life lately.

YOU: That sounds really sad, actually.

ME: Look, I've been going through some of my own stuff lately. Let's just stick  
to Cooper, okay?<sup>21</sup>

---

21

Fine! Take me to the Cooper stuff → pg 43

No, I want to know more about you two → pg 194

We have tried to stay friendly, so over coffee in a cafe we used to frequent, I told my ex that I was going to start writing that D. B. Cooper story I used to talk about and she said, “Aren’t you going to have a problem with that?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well the story doesn’t really have an end. Because the guy, like, disappeared. I mean, there’s no conclusion. How are you going to make a story that doesn’t have an ending?”

I wanted to tell her that I was glad she said that, because then I could agree and say, “You’re right, some things aren’t over yet even if they seem like they are.” But I didn’t say that to her and I didn’t tell her how much I believe that everything can make sense if you just know the right way to look at it. I didn’t say to her that I think all mysteries can be solved, that all problems have solutions, that everything, no matter how broken, can be healed. I wanted her to know how much I believe that is true. But I have never known how to say all that to her and before I could try, she said, “You know what you should do? Just figure out how he did it.”

“Oh sure, okay,” I say, “the FBI hasn’t done that, so I’ll just do it then.”

She shrugged.

“Well I guess I will round up the usual suspects.”

We finished our coffee and she kissed me and then left without looking back.<sup>22</sup>

---

22

Who are the usual suspects? → pg 46

You two don’t seem to understand how to be exes. What’s up with that? → pg 52

When I'm alone I often think about Special Agent Ralph Himmelsbach.

He's still alive, though no longer married, and his life is still devoted to the case. He spends his retirement appearing on basic cable unsolved mystery shows talking about Cooper. He got a pilot's license and a timeshare in a small plane, in his free time he still flies over the likely drop zone, peering down into the forests. Hoping to see something, a shred of 45-year-old white nylon or the glint of sunlight off a parachute carabineer. I have to wonder how much of his time is spent filing flight plans, paying for fuel, driving to and from the airport. How much of his life he has spent unfolding and refolding the same topographical maps, pulling the same manila file folders out of the same cardboard box in his den. I wonder about how quiet his house is, how dusty.<sup>23</sup>

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23

You think about him a lot, don't you? How come? → pg 57

Surprisingly little is known about Tina Mucklow.

She was married for a few years in the mid-70s, but it didn't stick. Her husband was a friend of Bob Rataczak, the co-pilot on the plane that day.

After the hijacking, Flight 305's pilot, Captain William Scott, sent her flowers and an expensive bottle of perfume. He always said that it was Tina's calm and easy charm that helped keep them alive that day.

The FBI file indicates that in the event Cooper was captured, Tina should not be made to testify against him because in each subsequent interview conducted with her agents noticed that she seemed to remember less and less of what had happened. Various psychologists and psychiatrists drafted into the Cooper investigation over the years have theorized that she was suffering from 'traumatic memory loss,' a symptom of what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Sometime after her divorce, she suffered a nervous breakdown and in 1979 joined the Carmel of Maria Regina Convent, a Carmelite Catholic Nunnery outside of Eugene, Oregon. The Carmelite Order was founded in the 1200s to honor the ascetic Spanish mystic Saint Teresa of Avila, who dedicated her life to the eremitic traditions of poverty, chastity, obedience, and seclusion from the world. Carmelites are sometimes referred to as "barefoot nuns" and they believe themselves to be "called to a hidden union with God." Every day the sisters of Maria Regina wake at 6am and engage in an hour of silent prayer before beginning a day of manual labor, growing their own food, and making altar breads. They practice solitude and self-denial in order to make space in their lives for God.

The day of the hijacking Tina spent about four hours with Cooper. She sat next to him as the plane circled Puget Sound while authorities on the ground in Seattle rounded up money and parachutes. She lit each of his cigarettes because he wouldn't take his right hand off the bomb detonator. She was twenty-two the day of the hijacking. When Cooper let the passengers and the other two stewardesses off the plane, he told her to stay. He told her to descend the stairway to retrieve the pouch filled with money. As she reached for it, for just a moment, her foot rested on the SeaTac tarmac. She could have run. But she didn't. She took the money up into the plane and handed it to him. Then she descended again, and she returned again, dragging parachutes up with her.

Cooperite conspiracy theorists claim that Tina was placed in the convent by the US Marshals Service Witness Security Program (WITSEC).

Old friends of Tina's claimed in interviews that after the hijacking she would break out in a sweat each morning when she reached to start her car. Some days she would just sit in the car in her own driveway, afraid that if she turned the key in the ignition the car would explode. Privately she confided to them that she believed Cooper was the type of person who would come back for her.

She lived at the convent until 1991, and then she decided to leave.

In 2011 a reporter from *The Mountain News* located her living in Bend, Oregon under a new name. Pictures were taken of her as she walked out of a grocery store. Her blonde hair had soften to a very soothing shade of gray. She looked like a 4th grade teacher. The reporter followed her home. He ambushed her with questions about D. B. Cooper. She only spoke to him once, saying, "You need to leave now."

It was not widely known in 1971, but the Boeing 727-100 was equipped with an escape hatch in the cockpit. On the ground in Seattle, while Cooper sat with his hand on the bomb, while Tina moved up and down the stairway, the rest of the crew could have slipped down through the hatch, into the Forward Electronic Service Center behind the radar, and climbed down an extendable ladder under the nose of the plane. They could have made a break for it across the runway. In quiet tones over hushed headsets they discussed it with the SeaTac tower crew, but they chose not to run. Running would have meant leaving Tina behind as the only hostage to a man with a bomb, four parachutes, and no way to get back in the air.

By all accounts she still lives in Bend, almost directly under the Vector 23 flightpath south from Seattle to Reno. On days when the weather is clear, she can look up from her garden and see the thin chalk marks of jets passing silently by above her.<sup>24</sup>

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24

What the hell happened on that plane? → pg 20



Robert W. Rackstraw owns a 45-foot Cruiser yacht named “Poverty Sucks”. It’s docked in San Diego near his boat shop. In 2016 he was again publicly claiming to be D. B. Cooper, something he’s done periodically throughout his life. He has the thick muscle-y jowls of an old boxer and sports a Hemingway beard.

Tom Colbert, an author and documentary film maker who used his own money to assemble a cold case team of more than 40 former FBI agents, various other retired law enforcement officers, professional researchers, and forensic scientists, happened to be working on a D. B. Cooper project at the time. His investigators confronted Rackstraw in a San Diego parking lot on a bright blue spring afternoon. The Investigator asks, “Did you board a Northwest Orient flight on November 24th, 1971 ...”

“What difference does it make?” Rackstraw asks, then he half turns and places his hand on the Investigator’s shoulder, almost tenderly. The way a father would touch a son’s arm before saying something like, *I’m proud of you.*

“Because if you’re D. B. Cooper,” the Investigator says, “the world would want to know your story.”

“Sure they would...” Rackstraw says with a smirk as he continues walking, still with a hand on the other man’s body, “... so would the FBI, and a secret indictment, and ...”

“Bob, you’re a folk hero ...”

Rackstraw pats the Investigator’s shoulder playfully and then takes his hand away, “Oh, no, come on.” But he’s smiling as he says it.

While this conversation was taking place and being filmed, three former FBI agents, all right handed, sat nearby in SUVs with very clean Glock-17s resting on top of their right thighs.

Once, while on trial for murdering his father-in-law, Rackstraw claimed to have served as a Green Beret in Vietnam. This is not true. He flew Bell UH-1 *Hueys* in Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division of the US Army. He *flew* with the Green Berets, he got them to teach him things. He went through jump training. He learned to fly fixed-wing aircraft. But he was never a Green Beret. He was known as a “chaser.” He’d spend his spare time lounging in the communications tent on his firebase waiting for a call to crackle in about a hot extraction anywhere nearby and then he’d sprint out to his chopper. He had more than 40 medals and decorations, many of which he’d legitimately earned, some of which he’d lied to get: two Distinguished Flying Crosses, five Purple Hearts, a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and 37 other various air medals. Numerous times in Vietnam he was disciplined because when he got bored he’d go out on parachute jumps with the South Vietnamese Army, for fun. He drove around Saigon in a jeep he’d stolen from a superior officer. He mounted a .50 caliber machine gun to the jeep. No one knew where he got that from.

In 1970 the United States briefly invaded Cambodia. Special Operations forces as well as the CIA handpicked pilots from 1st Cavalry and 101st Airborne to fly their missions and Rackstraw was happy to be tapped. By early 1971, when he rotated back stateside to Fort Rucker, Alabama, he’d been promoted to Lieutenant, which was not an unusual rank for a man with two college degrees, which he claimed to have, though he was in fact a high school dropout.

Having returned home, he immediately began beating his wife again, as he had been doing periodically before being deployed. This time, however, his children were old enough to recognize the abuse and they reported him. The Army MP investigation that followed exposed his various lies and misconduct. Rackstraw was discharged in 1971. This left him disgruntled.

He stole a car and left Alabama and the Army behind. He was headed out to California, but he took his time and drove through Oregon where he stole a small plane and started an under-the-table aerial photography business working for local land realtors. It was at about this time that he started using the alias Norman D. Winter. At some point in 1971, he started flying his own reconnaissance missions around the Pacific Northwest. He'd fly his little stolen plane around 10,000 feet and follow along below the commercial jets on Vector 23 down from Seattle. He determined their flight corridor south across Washington state was actually only 8 miles wide. From the air he would have learned to recognize Merwin Dam by the giant reservoir behind it on the Lewis River, called Lake Merwin. Rackstraw flew at night too, following the blipping red and white anti-collision lights of the jets above him. He would have seen that Merwin Dam in the 1970s was lit up from sunset to sunrise and glowed bright like an island of light in a dark sea of trees.

In the years that followed the hijacking of Flight 305, Rackstraw ended up training helicopter pilots in Iran for the Shah's air force. In 1978 he was arrested in Iran and extradited back to the US to face charges of explosives possession and check kiting. While out on bail, he attempted to fake his death by apparently crashing a rented plane into the Pacific Ocean near Monterey, California. Shortly afterward he was arrested in Fullerton, California on the charge of having forged a federal pilot's license. The plane he

claimed to have died in was also recovered, with a different paint job and fake tail number.

While in prison he called a reporter and claimed to be D. B. Cooper. By way of proof he said, “Get in touch with my uncle.”

His uncle was named Edward Cooper.

The reporter chose not to write the story.

Later, Rackstraw began working as a runner for cocaine dealers up and down the west coast. He would brag to his crew about the 1971 skyjacking he got away with. He once attended *D. B. Cooper Day* in Ariel, Washington (a yearly folk celebration at a bar near Lake Merwin where Cooperites from all over the world participate in look-a-like contests and argue over their theories and drink). While he was there, Rackstraw bought a black t-shirt that said in big white block type: *I'm D. B. Cooper*.

While working as a drug runner, Rackstraw completed a business degree at the University of San Francisco and went on to receive one of the first ever online law degrees, as well as a degree in international business. He subsequently taught as a college professor in California for ten years.

He was known to wear a gold South African Krugerrand on a chain around his neck. During the Apartheid years, the Krugerrand was the most popular way for South American cartels to launder money.

An FBI profiler once declared Rackstraw a “narcissistic sociopath”.

He was ultimately acquitted of murdering his father-in-law. During the trial he wore his Army dress uniform and sat in a wheelchair, though he has no physical disability.

These are only a few of the facts of Robert W. Rackstraw's life.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>

That's him! That's DB, I'm convinced. Now tell me about his jump → pg 41

I'm not convinced. Give me another suspect → pg 46

Well obviously this is Cooper ... unless you're not telling me something → pg 126

The aftstair had been designed to rest freely on the tarmac and so was not weighted or held in place by hydraulics. It would have bounced up and down on a current of dark wind as Cooper slowly made his way down it that night; the incongruous image of a man in a suit standing on an unstable metal stairway jutting out of the ass end of a jet in the middle of the night in the middle of a thunderstorm in the night sky above a primeval forest.

Imagine it.

Imagine it as you.

Every event and moment of your life having built to this moment: You're standing here, hands tightly gripping the slick metal railing, the night wind shrieking by you, and you look out at the utter blackness of the clouds and forests below. A crack of lighting out in front of you and for just that moment you can see it all, the forest, the mountains, every drop of rain. This is the moment when you have to contemplate the smallness of a single person compared to the vastness of such a dark world.

And then you take a breath and make the decision.

You let the muscles of your fingers loosen and then you fall forward into the sky.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>

So do I survive, or what? → pg 60

How much do you already know about D. B. Cooper?<sup>27</sup>

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27

- LOL! Wait, was this, like, a real thing, or whatever → pg 10
- I'm from Oregon, sooooo ... → pg 11
- I think maybe I've heard about this before, but there is a lot going on in my life, so maybe I need some more information → pg 10
- I am an amateur D.B Cooper hunter and cosplayer and I'm not really enjoying the flippant way that you are treating this subject matter which I have chosen to spend my life obsessed with, regardless of the adverse effects it has had on my marriage → pg 2
- I *am* D. B. Cooper → pg 44
- Hold on there buddy, I have some questions → pg 30

What sort of reading experience would you like to have?<sup>28</sup>

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28

- Fun, because I've had a long day → pg 45
- Interesting, I am very sophisticated → pg 42
- Deeply contemplative → pg 54
- Something with people who have feelings about things, and stuff → pg 78
- Just ridiculous, bordering on dumb → pg 127
- That is a deeply personal question and I don't feel that I should have to share that with you → pg 2
- Meta, supermeta → pg 50



HA! YOU HAVE FALLEN FOR MY RUSE! I have found you DB. What the  
FBI could not do for more than four decades, I have managed to do!

Are you impressed? You are, right?

Since I have you here, can I ask you a few questions? Would that be okay?<sup>29</sup>

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29

- Sure → pg 66
- Absolutely not → pg 47

What type of reader are you?<sup>30</sup>

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30

- I have considered organizing my bookshelves by color → pg 42
- The kind who would like to start reading an actual story already! → 78
- I enjoy reading German philosophers and bring them up unprovoked in casual conversations and know the proper pronunciation of the name *Goethe* → pg 54
- I read less than I should, but have gotten pretty good at lying about it → pg 42
- #HarryPotterForLife! → pg 13
- I only read stories that involve cryptozoology → 127
- I already find the structure of this book to be tedious → pg 2
- I am an English professor → pg 54

Now let's investigate! Choose a suspect:<sup>31</sup>

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31

The Paratrooper → pg 23

The Mormon → pg 74

The Canadian → pg 12

The Woman → pg 184

The Perfect Suspect → pg 14

Oh come on!<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>

Okay → pg 66

No → pg 7

When Flight 305 lifted off from Seattle airport, two F-106 Delta Dart fighter/interceptors were buzzing out of sight high above. Scrambled out of McChord Air Force Base south of Tacoma, Washington, the pilots were given specific instructions to tail Cooper at a distance of about 2 miles and to maintain visual contact with the plane.

The F-106 was developed specifically to intercept the Soviet supersonic long-range nuclear-capable bombers that were expected to - in the event of war - come streaming over the Arctic Circle from Siberia to wipe out American cities. It was a very fast single-seat delta-shaped jet and it could not fly slowly enough to stay behind Cooper. The two pilots flew giant S-curve patterns above the big slow Boeing all the way to Reno. This meant leaving the prime spotting position behind Flight 305 unoccupied more than it was occupied. Neither pilot saw Cooper's jump. Neither pilot saw a parachute deployed. Initially this was blamed on poor visibility due to the bad weather. The Air Force has never clarified whether or not the Delta Darts were armed.

At Reno airport FBI agents were stationed at the end of the runway as Flight 305 came in to refuel. They knew that the airstair was down and were told to watch for Cooper jumping off the plane as it landed. They did not see anyone hop off the plane.

The subsequent manhunt involved more than 1,000 police, sheriffs, and National Guardsmen. More than a half dozen Army Reserve helicopters and light aircraft filled the sky over southern Washington and northern Oregon and crisscrossed it for more than three weeks. A small submarine was used to search Lake Merwin, 40 miles north of Portland.

Unusually, the CIA agreed to use one of its top secret SR-71 Blackbird reconnaissance aircraft to comb the area, employing in the hunt for D. B. Cooper all of

the most state-of-the-art technology then being used to wage the Cold War. The CIA has never publicly commented on why this was done.

Searchers hiking in the Cascade Mountains discovered a human skull, but it was determined to have belonged to a Native American woman believed to have been the victim of a murder. A subsequent investigation was opened by local authorities.

The FBI interviewed every male in the Pacific Northwest with both the last name “Cooper” and a criminal history. The FBI looked into every single missing persons case from the weekend of the hijacking.

FBI Special Agent Ralph Himmelsbach, who worked the NORJACK (“Northwest Hijacking”) case for the remainder of his career, always believed that Cooper couldn’t have gotten his parachute deployed properly in the storm. While most searchers were told to look up into the tree canopy for a frozen body dangling from parachute straps or to listen for the sounds of that body swaying in the cold November wind, Himmelsbach instructed his agents to look down, for any unusual pits in the ground that might have been caused by a human body colliding with the forest floor at more than 200 miles per hour. Calmly - Himmelsbach is a preternaturally calm man - he told his agents to pay special attention to any scavenging animals that looked well-fed. He told his agents to be alert for minor body parts scattered about. He said to keep an eye out for small things, like human teeth that might have been blasted out into the underbrush when D. B. Cooper’s jaw bone was shattered by its impact with the ground.<sup>33</sup>

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33

Take me back to the suspects → pg 46

What would it have actually been like out there for DB → pg 25

Are you sure?<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>

Yes → pg 6

No → pg 9

You're falling through cloud layer, through cloud layer, through cloud layer.

You're falling faster than the drops of rain, you're colliding with patches of frozen ice crystals falling. They're peppering your face and eyes like sharp white buckshot.

Your arms and legs outstretched to slow you down as you fall, as you fall, as you fall, but your shoes have blown off, you aren't wearing gloves, you can't feel your fingers. You're trying to count but you've lost count. You're feeling dizzy as you fall, as you fall, as you fall down through the lowest cloud layer now and you can see the mountains rushing to meet you and you realize you're in a spin, spinning, spinning. You are tumbling and didn't know it. You see cloud and then sky and then mountain rushing up, and then cloud, then sky, mountain, sky, mountain, sky, mountain. You are tumbling. You've been falling too long. Mountain. You try to bend your arm to your ripcord. Sky. It doesn't bend. Mountain. You try to curl your fingers into a hook. Sky. They do not curl. Mountain. You try to close your eyes. Sky. They will not close. Mountain. You cannot feel your body anymore. Sky. All you can feel is the fall. Mountain.

This is how the story ends.



My mother called and even though I was kind of busy flipping through pages on the FBI file online, I answered. She had all the usual news about all of the usual people. She is the central repository of family information and none of us talk to each other because it's more efficient just to talk to her. I never told her the story of what happened.

Finally she asked what I was working on and I told her I was working on a story about D. B. Cooper, "Oh I remember when that happened! We saw it at Grandma and Papa's house because we were there for Thanksgiving. Remember that huge black and white TV they had? Grandma said that he was probably some hippie. She went through a phase when she didn't like hippies because she thought they were just complaining. She lived through the Dust Bowl though, remember, so she thought that *everyone* was just complaining. People were just fascinated by it all. I think it gave them something fun to think about. That was a bad time remember, Vietnam was still going on and Nixon had just been elected. Robert Kennedy was dead, Martin Luther King was dead. It was a bad time."

And it made me start thinking, because I do remember that big black and white TV. I remember it better than I remember my grandfather, who has been dead a really long time now and how even though I knew him, Papa, it didn't do much to me when he finally went. It wasn't like I'd really *known* him. And while my mother was talking in my ear I started to wonder if I knew her at all. Or if I could. It was hard, the first time I'd realized that she was a just a person and so that meant she was going to die eventually. Because that world, the one without your mother in it, what sense does *that* make? The world can't just throw out the script like that halfway through.

Can it?

Like a movie that just changes genres in the middle?

And I think about DB and how he had a mother. Biologically speaking he pretty much had to. And what was her name? And so I thought about DB, or whoever he was when he wasn't DB, with a phone pressed to his ear, saying, "Oh really?" to his mother at periodic intervals as she talked. And then he snaps out of existence, like a magician's trick and he is sitting on a plane and he says, "Miss, you'd better look at that note. I have a bomb." But why does he have to snap out of existence, I wonder. Well, probably because he can't be both of those people, can he? The man on the plane in the black sunglasses *and* the man who has a mother. Because D.B. Cooper wasn't a real person, he was a make-believe person, and so he didn't have a mother. Because you can't both have a mother *and* not have a mother. People can't be two totally different things. They can only be the one thing.

"Oh really?" I say.

And I think about binary states and I think about my ex and then finally my mother has delivered and collected all the information and she says goodbye and I say goodbye and then I hang up and I look around my little apartment and I look at all of my D. B. Cooper notes and I wonder if I'm becoming one of the crazy Cooper people.

I look around my little apartment, at the maps on the walls, at the drifts of dust in the corners like crashed clouds and I realize how quiet it is now and how much that bothers me.<sup>35</sup>

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35

Why does that bother you? → pg 32

You will likely have considered that it is not actually possible to write a story about D. B. Cooper. One can write an academic journal article about him or a nonfiction book. It is not, however, possible to successfully fictionalize the man and the events of the crime. This is due not simply to the unsolved nature of his crime, but rather to the troubling instability of the realities which surround the case. All fictions require a stable set of internal realities. Special Agent Ralph Himmelsbach, who spent most of his career attempting to find DB, once described this curious haze around Cooper, saying, “The problem is that almost anything can be true, but nothing ever stays true if you look at it long enough. I know everything about it that there is to know, and some days I’m not sure if I even know anything at all.”

What he is describing is a truism commonly understood by Cooperites. Facts, suspects, stories, and indeed reality itself exist in an almost superpositional state, swirling around Cooper. One combination of that information will lead to a seemingly indisputable truth; the identity of the man and the resolution of the mystery. Yet a different combination of that same information will seem to prove definitively that it could not have been *that person* who did this. The D. B. Cooper case has not gone unsolved because of a lack of information. It remains unsolved because there is too much information and all of it appears to have come from different and incongruous realities.

One could be forgiven for thinking of Jacques Derrida at Johns Hopkins in 1966, intoning in his slippery accent, “(...) the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of

metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix (...) is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) alētheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth” (Derrida).

The functional thesis then which underlies this D. B. Cooper story is that it is not a D. B. Cooper story, because no such story can be produced. Such a story would rely on the empty center of Structuralism which Derrida demonstrated has been ruptured or had perhaps never existed to be ruptured in the first place and so has therefore never been ruptured. “The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*” (Derrida). Cooper is both the center and the elsewhere of any story about him. This is why the only film about him is considered a disaster and also why no serious piece of fiction has ever dealt with him, but conversely this is also why adaptations and wild fictionalizations of his story have proven massively popular amongst the subaltern artistic communities. Journalist Geoffrey Gray, author of the nonfiction book *Skyjack: The Hunt for D. B. Cooper*, explained, “He represented something very potent in that moment. He became a sort of counter-culture hero, a bad guy who even the good guys wanted to get away. He was a sort of sky pirate, a bizarro Robin Hood. He was able to, as an individual, overtake these big complex things called airplanes, this big complex thing called law enforcement, and make away with a fortune at a time when the country was in a recession and a cultural civil war. The problem from a factual point of view, though, is that Cooper

was made into this cultural hero. And the truth is that the guy who hijacked the plane and the guy who everyone thinks hijacked the plane are two totally different people (Turner).”

It would be possible to write the story of D. B. Cooper as cultural figure, as semiotic sign, as amalgamation of cultural psychic energy, but any attempt to write the story of D. B. Cooper as an actual human would require fictionalizing him, which is not possible because he is already fictional in real life, except that he once wasn't.

To summarize:

It is not possible to write a story about D. B. Cooper.

This is a story about D. B. Cooper.<sup>36</sup>

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36

I totally get it → pg 10

Can you explain that in a way that doesn't require me to have an advanced degree in Post-Structuralist Semiotics? → pg 97

Every day I wake up to my life, it turns out to be the same life I had yesterday. Only that's not true every single day, just almost all of them. But in that *almost*, that's where life actually happens.

I think about my ex and the man she lives with now and I wonder what he knows, because I have never asked her, when we meet at a motel or for coffee, he just isn't on my mind. I wonder if, when they lie in bed, if he delicately runs his fingers up and down her spine or touches the little mole just below her rib cage on the left side and I think about Tina and how she was married once - I think - and if, when she moves in with someone she says, "There's something you need to know about this thing that happened to me once ..."

"So have you caught D.B. Cooper?" my ex asks, lighting a cigarette because we have a smoking room and this is the only time she smokes anymore and I remember how hard it was for her to quit, for those first 12 weeks anyway.

"What do I get when I do?"

"Released from the endlessness of uncertainty," she holds the cigarette out to me.

I don't smoke anymore either, but I take it and I smoke and I ask, "What's the name of that guy? The Greek king who had to roll the rock up the same hill every day?"

"Sisyphus."

"Right, him. Every day, the same rock, the same rock, the same rock, and what happens if one day - maybe just by accident - he gets the rock to the top of the hill and he manages to get it to stay there? What then? Does he just say, *Hey guys, I finally finished that job you gave me!*"

"What's your point?" She talks that way.

I hand the cigarette back to her, “Does anybody really give a shit about who D. B. Cooper is? The mystery is the thing people like. When you don’t know something, the world is just possibilities. The minute you know something, it becomes *just* the world.”

She puts the cigarette out in a little black ashtray, “I need to get dressed.”

Then she gets dressed, slipping back into her skirt, then her blouse, then her coat. She kisses me goodbye but doesn’t say goodbye and then she leaves and when I am sure that she is completely gone, I say out loud to her, “Did you have a list of names picked out? That you wanted to argue over?”

And she would have said, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

And I would have said, “You didn’t have to leave ...”

She would have said, “Look, I know you never blamed me ...”

“I don’t.”

“... for what happened, but I blame me. Somehow. It’s like, you go to sleep one night and your whole life is the way it’s supposed to be and then you wake up and it’s not your life anymore and it’s not the way you want it to be. I couldn’t look at you. I couldn’t look at me. I just saw, something that had become not real.”

I thought about the only ultrasound and the small *thud-thud* sound of a heart, and who did that belong to? Who was that person?

I remember the night we woke up and there was blood in the bed. Because somehow that little *thud* had gone away. It had disappeared in the dark somewhere. And so I wondered where that person had gone. Who was that person, that the heart belonged to? How does a person just disappear?

I got up and I got dressed.

I looked at the stubbed out cigarette butt in the ashtray. I thought about the rock rolling back down the hill. I thought about gravity. About how mass attracts mass. How a person doesn't actually fall to earth, their very being is drawn toward it by the very forces that make living on the planet possible in the first place. Without gravity to help us out, we'd all just float off alone into the nothingness.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>

I find your love life insufferable, take me back to D. B. Cooper → pg 46  
You seem to be taking a pretty dark turn ... → pg 196



You're falling.

*One ...*

But you know how to fall, you've practiced.

*Two ...*

You're counting to four before you pull.

*Three ...*

What are you aiming for?

*Four ...*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>

The trees → pg 68

The lake → pg 63

The dam → pg 71

Anything. Anything I can see. Anything that gets me out of this alive → pg 51

The term “skyjacking” is an informal one. Technically and legally a skyjacking is referred to as an ‘aircraft hijacking.’ This is different than either the theft of an aircraft or the taking of hostages, though it is, in a way, also both of those.

The first known skyjacking was on a clear blue May 15th in 1928 and took place 2,800 feet above Detroit. The skyjacker was armed with a ball peen hammer. It resulted in the crash of the aircraft.

In the United States the golden era of skyjacking began on May 1st, 1961 when National Airlines Flight 337 was hijacked out of Miami and forced to divert to Havana, Cuba.

Between 1961 and 1973, more than 160 commercial aircraft were hijacked in American airspace. The trend peaked when, between 1968 and 1973, there averaged one skyjacking a week somewhere in the atmosphere above the Earth. The August 11, 1972 cover story of LIFE Magazine was an in-depth investigation of “the epidemic.”

The first American skyjacker to demand a ransom was Arthur Gates Barkley, who hijacked Trans World Airlines Flight 486 out of Phoenix on June 4, 1970. Throughout the 1960s, skyjackings were primarily political acts. Barkley, however, believed the IRS had miscalculated his taxes and overcharged him by \$471.78. He appealed to the United States Supreme Court for either justice or reimbursement and received neither. His brief to the Court began, “I am being held a slave by the United States ...” When the Supreme Court declined to hear his case, Barkley kissed his wife goodbye, drove to the Phoenix airport, and boarded Flight 486 with his .22-caliber pistol, a straight razor, and a steel can full of gasoline. He did not have to smuggle these items onto the plane, as there were no security measures in existence at the time. In the sky above Albuquerque he cunningly

gained entry to the cockpit by opening its unlocked door. He demanded \$100 million dollars to be paid to him by the United States Supreme Court directly. TWA officials, confused by this demand, offered Barkley their cash-on-hand of \$100,750, at which point he asked them to let the FBI take over negotiations. Ultimately on the ground at Dulles, FBI snipers shot out Flight 486's landing gear. Passengers - most of whom were drunk because Barkley had demanded that stewardesses give them all free drinks, meals, and snacks - panicked and began rushing out the emergency exits onto the plane's wings, at which point FBI agents stormed the plane and engaged in a gunfight with Barkley, shooting him through the right hand. Barkley was later declared incompetent to stand trial and was committed to a psychiatric hospital for the criminally insane in Georgia.

The golden age of skyjackings ended on January 5, 1973 when the Federal government finally instituted nationwide security protocols for commercial air travel. One such measure was a white aerodynamic wedge affixed to the exterior of all Boeing 727 aftstairs. Airflow over the wedge turned it sideways and prevented the aftstair from opening while in flight. In a curious homage to the only unsolved skyjacking in American history, the weather vane-like wedge is referred to as a 'Cooper vane.'<sup>39</sup>

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39

I have a hunch now about this whole thing, who are our suspects? → pg 46  
Take me back to the plane → pg 17

You stretch your arms and legs out immediately as you fall into the blast. You're falling, but you've fallen before. You know how to fall. You keep your head down, eyes narrow, you can see the lake. Lake Merwin is a long fissure. Through the intermittent patches of cloud you can see the white yellow glow of the dam just below you.

You are falling fast. It's time. You're as on-target as you're going to get.

You grab the ripcord on your chest and you PULL and you SNAP up and like a miracle the big white chute is hanging above you and you are hanging from it and *HOLY SHIT! You're not dead!*

You look down at your feet and you realize your shoes have blown off. That's not great for you. Past your feet you can see the dark black of the lake rising up slowly toward your feet. You're going to come down dead center in the lake. That's not great for you. But you can swim. You used to swim a lot, though. Not so much lately.

The water is rising up to meet you.

You look around. You can't even see the plane anymore.

You're lower than the peaks of the mountains now.

You're lower than the tops of the trees now.

The water is coming up fast.

You're going to hit.

You cross your arms over your chest and take a deep breath.

You hit.

The water sucking you up.

Your arms sweep out in a wide stroke toward the surface, but your downward momentum is still driving you down.

The water sucking you down.

You make wide strokes.

The white nylon of the parachute is pooled on the surface above you; pale white on bright black.

The parachute pack is canvas and sucking up water. The reserve chute on your chest is canvas and filled with 20 pounds of nylon reserve parachute. Your arms are thrashing now. Have to get to the surface. Have to get to air.

The money bag is canvas. The money weighs 25 pounds, dry. It weighs more now.

You're pulling at the clips and buckles of the parachute pack. Of the reserve chute, of the money bag. The money bag? Are you going to ditch the money bag? Your legs are kicking. Your arms are flailing in the water now.

Your lungs want to breathe. Your mouth wants to open. Wants to gasp. Wants air. Your body wants to breathe. It wants to open. You can't get the belts off. You can't get the money off. The water sucking you down.

You can't stop it. Your mouth opens, your body tries to suck in air. It sucks in water. Freezing water in your body. In your throat. Your body tries to push it out. Can't.

The water sucking you down. Down.

Can't

Down.

Water.

Can't.

Down.

Drown.

Water.

Can't.

This is how the story ends.

Have you heard the Todd Snider song “D. B. Cooper”? It’s kind of a slow and twangy thing. The kind of song that a guy with a guitar and a not-that-great voice can sing while sitting at a campfire and it makes the night just right. I wonder if maybe you would own it on a nice 78. I like to think that you’re a vinyl guy. Maybe some nights you’ll pour yourself a drink and pull the record from its dust cover and put it on a really high-end turntable. You’ll turn the lights down low and sit in your favorite chair and close your eyes and remember the one time in your life when you really had everything under control. I wonder if you’ve spent all of these years circling around that day, without being able to ever tell anyone about it. I wonder if you kept news clippings. I wonder if every time some new random came forward claiming to be you, or made a deathbed confession (there have been at least four), if that just pissed you off. I wonder if maybe you ever picked up the phone, held it in your hand and looked at the phone number for *The Oregonian* that you have tacked up above the phone on a little slip of paper that has started to yellow and curl at the edges.

I wonder about you now when each year September comes and goes again and for a few days the people who live inside the television talk about hijackings. About what they are and what they mean and how they can change everything on the ground.

I think about you when I’m in line at the airport. I think about you when I have to take my shoes off. I think about you during those few seconds when I stand inside the body scanner with my arms up like I’m being cartoon arrested, while I listen to the gray whoosh of the sensor swishing around me.

If you went right back to work Monday morning, what did you say when your coworkers asked how your Thanksgiving went? Did you just say, “Fine”?

What did you do with the money? You couldn't spend it in the United States. Is it in your basement? A block of cash wrapped in black trash bags? For almost half a century? A man your age and of your generation is probably going to die of heart disease. My father died that way. It's a long and lonely way to do it. Did you find yourself in a stiff blue bed with tubes coming out of your body while you died slowly in front of strangers? How did you find a way to feel good about your own life when the one extraordinary thing you ever did had to stay a secret? Did you have two kids and maybe one Halloween dress them up in little dark suits with parachutes dragging along behind them on the sidewalk? Did you go through their candy that night and then peek in on them sleeping? Did you think to yourself, *How could I have been so reckless? One mistake and I would have missed all of this.*

I like to think you're the kind of guy who never outgrew dive bars and so sometimes, on the road, stops in to get a drink and strikes up a conversation with the old timers, asks them, "What was the name of that man? The one who jumped out of the plane?" and then just let them tell you your own story.

Have you gotten to live long enough that you can look back on the man you were back then when you were D. B. Cooper and ask yourself, "Who even *was* that guy?"<sup>40</sup>

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40

Indeed, who *was* that guy? → pg 10



The moment your feet left the airstair, you were still connected to the plane by your velocity. It was traveling forward at 200 miles per hour, as you fell from the back of it, you were still moving with the motion of the plane. Now as you fall down down, you are still drifting laterally in the sky.

You throw your arms and legs out wide into the blast. You fall through cloud layer, through cloud layer, through cloud layer. You reach for the ripcord ring on your chest. You break through the cloud layer and the forest is rushing up at you. You pull hard.

The parachute explodes high and fast above you and the rush of wind is snapped away and there is silence. You hang in the night sky. You are still falling, just much slower. You look down at your feet. Your shoes are gone. You look past your feet at the forest. There is nothing below you that isn't forest, that isn't trees. You can start to make out the spires of individual trees. So many trees. Trees coming up at you fast.

You know you're going to go into the trees. You cross your ankles tight. You cross your arms over your chest, hugging yourself. You bury your face into the crook of your arm.

You're going to hit.

Then you hit.

The branches swallow you up. Your body getting whipped. The loud thrash of wood and green needles, and you're actually still falling and you feel pain and rips and slices on your legs, on your arms, on your head as you fall.

A sharp sudden searing stab through your gut and you scream. You're falling and your chest is hot and you're falling and then a jerk and you're not falling anymore. Your vision is blinding white and hot and blue and stars and you feel lightheaded.

You feel drunk.

You look at your hands and they are covered in blood. They are soaking wet and covered in your own blood and you think, *That is not how that is supposed to be.*

You look around and you realize there is nothing below you. But then you realize that you're wrong. The ground is down there below you. Way way way down there below you.

You're dangling up in the trees. The parachute snagged up above you. You're hanging in the parachute harness. It is not actually that uncomfortable.

You're fingers poke around your gut, below where the reserve parachute and money bag are strapped on.

You can't see what has happened to you.

Your slick fingertips feel something ... you touch it and scream. It is a long sharp spear of branch jabbed into the soft part of your body. You raise your hands back up to your face and there is just enough moonlight for you to see how dark the blood is. It is very very dark.

Soon your body doesn't feel hot. It feels very very cold.

There is no sound at all except for your own breathing, so you listen to that. You listen to your own breathing. It sounds very loud, but also, somehow, very far away. Like it is a noise that is moving away from you. Like the noise of something very far away that

is moving even farther away. You hang there up in the air above the forest floor and you listen to your breathing as it gets softer and more distant.

Softer and more distant.

Softer ...

and more distant.

Softer.

Distant ...

This is how the story ends.

You stretch your arms and legs out immediately as you fall into the blast. You're falling, but you've fallen before. You know how to fall. You keep your head down, eyes narrow, you can see the lake. Lake Merwin is a long fissure. Through the intermittent patches of cloud you can see the white yellow glow of the dam just below you.

You are falling fast. It's time. You're as on-target as you're going to get.

It's time.

You grab the ripcord on your chest and you PULL and you SNAP up and like a miracle ghost the big white chute is hanging above you and you are hanging from it and *HOLY SHIT! You're not dead!*

You're floating now. Drifting ever downward.

You take stock. Your feet are freezing. You look down and see your shoes have blown off. You take stock. The parachute has deployed properly above you. Your rate of descent is fine. The money bag is still strapped to your belly. It is still clipped closed; you haven't lost the cash. The reserve chute is strapped across your upper chest.

The water is coming up fast now.

Before you jumped, back on the plane, after you sent Tina away, you reached into the attache case. You pulled out all the red sticks that were never dynamite. You stuffed them into your pockets. You pull one out now, pull the cap off and strike it hard and it sizzles and explodes to life and you drop it and it burns bright live red all the way down to the surface of the lake.

The water is coming up very fast now.

You think, *Here we go.*

You cross your arms over your chest and take a deep breath.

You hit.

The water sucks you in.

You don't think. You just do.

You jerk the releases on the harness straps, unclipping from the chute pooling on the surface of the lake above you. You let all the extra weight on your body drag you down out of the jellyfish tangle of parachute cords and cables.

You jerk free of the reserve chute.

*You want to breathe.*

You wriggle out of the parachute harness and pack.

Your body wants to breathe.

Your arms reach up and out above you and you work them down hard through the water, lifting your body up toward the surface. Lifting your money up toward the surface.

*You want to breathe.*

You kick and swim hard up to the surface.

Your body is so tired and heavy.

You kick hard.

You reach.

The tips of your fingers feel air. You kick hard and your face breaks the surface of the lake and you suck in air loud and hard and fast and you are alive. You are alive and the air is good. You are kicking hard to stay up, but you manage to fish out another marine flare and you kick hard and you hold the flare above your head and you strike it hard and you hear it ignite and it lights up red everything around you and you look out

across the roiling black surface of the water. You look out at all the trees that surround the lake and all the mountains that seem to surround the whole world.

And then you hear it. The distant low throb of an outboard motor.

You're still kicking hard, you're still waving the sizzling flare, but you know now that you've done it. You've done it and survived it.

The engine noise is getting closer.

You hear yourself laugh out loud.

You think, *No one is ever going to believe this.*

The little fishing boat is close enough now to see and you hear a familiar voice call out to you, "Need a lift?"

This is how the story ends.

## THE MORMON

After he retired, the FBI Special Agent who had shot and killed Richard Floyd McCoy Jr. in Virginia Beach, Virginia in 1974 told a journalist, “When I shot Richard McCoy, I shot D. B. Cooper at the same time.”

Even after his death, McCoy’s family claimed that he’d spent Thanksgiving 1971 at their family home in Utah. Though an errant credit card charge placed him in Las Vegas the day after Cooper hijacked Flight 305.

What is certain is that less than five months after the Cooper skyjacking, McCoy boarded United Airlines Flight 855 in Denver. The plane was also a Boeing 727-100 with an aftstair. He had with him a fake pistol and plastic grenade. He wore a wig, a fake moustache, and silver sunglasses. He had also brought with him a large carry-on duffle bag. Once the plane was in the air, McCoy signalled to the stewardess. He showed her the grenade and as she watched, he gripped the safety release and pulled the pin. Still squeezing the grenade, he placed the pin into her hand and asked her to take it to the captain. The plane diverted to San Francisco.

McCoy asked for \$500,000 (more than twice as much as Cooper) and two parachutes. He then gave the stewardess a pre-written list of telephone numbers for places in the Bay Area where authorities could quickly acquire the parachutes.

When Flight 855 touched down in San Francisco it was met with the money and parachutes. Tucked inside each chute there was a small radio transmitter. McCoy let the passengers off and gave the stewardess a pre-written note with detailed flight instructions that would take the plane back over the Sierra Nevada Mountains at an altitude of 10,000 feet and at a speed of 175 miles per hour.

In the dark clear night over Nevada, McCoy lowered the aftstair and tossed out one of the parachutes. There were two chase planes tailing Flight 855 and one of them peeled off to follow the chute's radio signal. The plane circled above the signal for hours until local Nevada sheriff's deputies arrived and found only the unopened parachute.

As the plane moved closer to the Utah border, McCoy threw out the second chute and the second chase broke off to follow it.

McCoy unzipped his duffle bag. Inside he had a jumpsuit, helmet, gloves, goggles, a wrist altimeter, and Para-Commander performance skydiving parachute. He was already wearing boots and thermal underwear.

In the months following the Cooper skyjacking, nearly all planes in the air over America had been outfitted with a special peephole so that the crew in the cockpit could see into the cabin. McCoy covered this peephole with a piece of tape.

He made the jump outside of Provo, Utah.

McCoy had been born in North Carolina but at 20 he moved to Provo, Utah to attend college at Brigham Young University. Soon after, he dropped out and signed on for his first of two tours in Vietnam. That was 1962. He was trained as a pilot and demolitions expert. He became a Green Beret. After his first tour he returned to Utah and got married. He became an enthusiastic skydiving hobbyist. He signed on for a second tour in the Army under the strict guarantee that he get to go back to Vietnam. When he finally returned to Utah to settle down, he'd earned a Purple Heart, a Distinguished Flying Cross, an Army Commendation Medal, and A Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. He began teaching Mormon Sunday School, joined the Utah Air National Guard, and started studying law enforcement at BYU.



By 1971, McCoy was in his final year at the Utah State Patrol police academy, but then in the winter of that year, about the same time DB Cooper would have been crawling out of the woods of the Pacific Northwest, McCoy had something of a nervous breakdown. He was briefly admitted to a psychiatric hospital where he was diagnosed with “delayed-stress syndrome, confusion and disorientation”. The doctors assumed this was related to his time in Vietnam.

It only took McCoy a couple of weeks to return to the routines of his life at the police academy.

In early 1972 there was a Cooper-copycat skyjacking out of Denver airport. The man who did it was a Vietnam vet named Richard LaPoint. He’d been caught because after Cooper, the FBI started putting radio transmitters in ransom parachutes. This fact became widely known amongst law enforcement all over the country. LaPont had only gotten \$50,000. Cooper had gotten away with \$200,000. At the time McCoy absently mused to a friend that \$500,000 would be about the right take for a job like that.

Two months later, McCoy was gently parachuting to the ground outside of Provo.

He buried the chute and hitchhiked the rest of the way back to his house. He never took off the jumpsuit, which seemed strange to the man who’d picked him up and odder still the next day when that driver learned there’d been a skyjacking over Utah. The driver called the FBI who matched McCoy to fingerprint and handwriting samples from Flight 855.

The FBI had to wait at McCoy’s house in Provo for several hours because when they went to arrest him, McCoy was on Air National Guard duty flying a helicopter looking for the hijacker. They also found the \$500,000 buried in his cellar.

At his arraignment on the charge of air piracy, he said to a group of reporters, "Let's face it, this is embarrassing."

He was sentenced to 40 years in prison and transferred to the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. He'd been there less than two years when he carved a replica handgun out of dental paste, used it to hijack a garbage truck, and rammed the garbage truck right through the front gates of the prison.

He was on the lam for four months and on the FBI's most wanted list, but finally he was cornered at a motel in Virginia Beach. The official report is that the former Sunday School teacher opened fire first and moments later Richard Floyd McCoy died of a shotgun blast to the chest.

There has never been any evidence actually connecting McCoy to the original hijacking, though in the late 1990s there was an internet rumor that Cooper had left behind a gold BYU medallion, but the FBI has always categorically denied that. No mention is made of the medallion in any of the FBI files, except once, to note that there was no medallion.<sup>41</sup>

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41

I don't think it was him. Take me back to the suspects → pg 46  
He was totally the guy! Tell me about the jump → pg 41

No one knows how you got to Portland Airport on November 24, 1971, so let's just say that you took a cab. Even though the FBI would later interview every cab driver they could find in Portland and none of them would claim to recognize the sketch of you.

You stepped out of the cab and into the rain. It was a cold and gray day but you were wearing dark horn rimmed sunglasses because they made you feel cool. You smoke a Raleigh cigarette and look at your reflection in the glass doors of the airport. Probably you are wearing a dark business suit and a long overcoat. You are wearing a skinny black tie from JC Penny's and a mother-of-pearl tie pin. You have dark hair parted on the left side. You're about 40. This is how most of the passengers would later describe you. This is how you look in the iconic sketch called "Composite A" done by FBI sketch artist Roy Rose. You look sort of like a badass Bing Crosby. Or maybe not.

Robert Gregory, a paint salesman who would be a passenger on Flight 305 later that night, would tell the FBI that your suit was "russet" colored, a kind of dark brown with underlying hints of purple and orange. A color only ever used in men's suits in the early 1970s. Gregory would describe your hair "marcelled" meaning somewhat wavy and undulating. Some of the passengers would say that you were olive complected. A few notes in your FBI files would call you "swarthy." It is possible you look a bit like Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*.

You're carrying an attache case, maybe it's black, maybe it's brown. Possibly it is filled with dynamite (as stewardess Alice Hancock would later claim) possibly it isn't. Sometimes you are carrying a paper bag with you. Sometimes you aren't. You walk up to the Northwest Orient Airlines ticketing counter. You wait patiently in line. You calmly ask the agent about Flight 305 to Seattle. "That plane is a Boeing 727-100, right?"

“Yes it is,” she responds to you, trying to ignore what an unusual question that is.

Had the ticketing agent said, “No, sir” what would you have done? The 727 was the only airplane in commercial service anywhere in the world with a built-in aft stairway and therefore the only plane from which you would be able to make your jump safely that night. Short of a military Douglas DC-3, any other plane would have required you to leap from a side door and immediately dodge a wing or horizontal stabilizer. Even getting clipped by either would kill you. Any jet larger than a 727 would see its engines stall out at any speed slow enough to make a jump possible. For a brief moment you wonder how committed you are. Once you jump, what do you care if the plane engines stall and the whole thing nose dives into the Cascade mountains. You study the pretty face of the ticketing agent, imagine her as a stewardess clutching the armrests of an airplane seat, screaming as the engines give out and then you are watching the plane tumble end over end below while you float along hanging from your parachute in the sky.

But then she says, “Yes it is,” and you put those thoughts out of your mind.

“I’d like a one-way ticket please.” You hand her a \$20 bill because it is 1971 and that is what a plane ticket costs. She hands you a ticket to sign because it is 1971 and that is how air travel works. She does not ask to see your ID because it is 1971 and that is how air travel works. She does not ask if you have a gun or a bomb or a knife or any liquids and she does not ask you take off your shoes because it is 1971 and that is how air travel works. She hands you a red pen to write your name on the ticket.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> What name do you write on the ticket?

D. B. Cooper → pg 114

Dan Cooper → pg 187

Zoltan Basternak → pg 104

You leap up and look to the plane. Amelia is already in the pilot's seat.

Another gunshot comes from the top of the conning tower. You dash to the plane and scramble up the wing. You throw yourself into the back seat.

"Where's Jimmy?" Amelia calls back.

"He's gone missing, again."

You can see Amelia shrug, as if to say, *I'll take what I can get*. "Hold on!" she shouts.

The whole plane jerks as the catapult blasts it forward up the launch ramp. The tail dips slow as it clears the nose of the sub and then you are up in the air and flying for real. You hear more distant gunshot and the flat *whumps* of bullets hitting the fuselage, and then nothing. Quickly you're out over the water. Then over the trees.

You wrestle your body into the seat and pull on the straps of the parachute harness there. Then you belt into the seat itself.

"Do you want to hear a joke?" You shout over the noise of the engine, "Charles Manson, Richard Nixon, and Sonny Bono meet up at a bar ..."

The plane kicks hard and shutters.

"We're losing engine pressure!" she shouts back.

"WHAT?"

"They must have hit one of the fuel lines."

The plane is rumbling over the dark forests. You can see the flat green glow of the portal out in the distance. "Can we make it?"

"I don't know."

The plane jerks and shutters again.

You look down at the trees below you. You think about the trees that passed below you just before you jumped out of Flight 305 over Washington state. “You know,” you yell, “if I’m just going to die anyway, I wish I’d brought the money with me.”

The plane closes the distance to the green glow.

Amelia calls back, “I never actually planned for this part. Do we go up from the bottom? Or down from the top?”

“Well, stuff falls out of the bottom.”

“Then we’ll go in from the top.”

Amelia lifts the nose of the plane up, up, up just as it shutters again and dies out. The propeller seizes to a tight stop and there is no noise at all except for the night wind rushing by. The plane’s velocity allows it to glide upward and forward a little longer. Then it holds for just a moment. It is that very very long moment at the top of the first drop of every roller coaster.

In a very quiet voice you hear Amelia say, “We should probably bail out.”

“Yeah.”

The nose of the plane crests over that peak of its velocity and gravity begins to equalize all things. The nose tips down, down, down. The big wide glow is below you now. You wrestle to unclip from the seat. Amelia is faster at it and better at it than you and she is about to throw her body free of the plane when she looks back at you and says, “Good luck!” and then she is gone.

You struggle with the belts. You get one loose. The plane is beginning to fall faster now. Faster. Too fast. You get another one loose.

The green is rushing up at you and you have no idea where it will spit you out.

You get the last one loose. You grab the canopy and launch yourself out into the sky.

The plane plummets away and you pull hard on the ripcord. The big white parachute blossoms out above you and the whole thing jerks you back up higher in the clear night sky.

You look down past your feet as the empty plane tumbled into the portal. There is a green flash and then it is gone.

You wiggle your toes inside your shoes. You say out loud, "I feel like I just did this."

As you drift slowly downward, it occurs to you that you're DB Cooper, you're probably the last of the modern folk heroes. The last of the mythical American outlaws. Maybe this is all you'll ever do now. Maybe DB Cooper needs to be forever falling.

You float down through the center of the hole in the sky and then you are gone.

“Screw you, I’m out,” you say, thinking this will increase your bargaining position.

Hale and Amelia recede away up the aisle. Jimmy begins to stand and as he does you can see, now that the lights are on, several of the headrests around you are stained with blood.

Jimmy reaches into the waistband of his suit pants and draws an ugly little snub-nosed revolver.

“Well then what fuckin’ good are ya?” Jimmy points the gun at your head, you smash your eyes closed. You hear the hammer roll back, but you’re dead before the sound of the gun shot even makes it to your ears.



You hold your folded note out to her. You'd spent hours and many drafts getting this one just perfect.

She looks a little bored as she reaches out and takes the note from you. She smiles a clearly fake smile and slips the note into her purse hanging from her jumpseat at the rear bulkhead.

*She didn't even look at it! You think, I am totally fucked now. Why did she do that?!*

But as you're looking at her bend at the knees and settle back down into her seat, you realize that she is very slim and attractive and has just fabulous hair. It occurs to you that if you weren't trying to hijack her, you would probably hit on her. She probably gets a lot of notes from drunk businessmen trying to look up her skirt while she serves drinks. You feel a little bad for her now, considering what you're about to do, but you suck in a lot of air and try to puff up your chest and you say quietly, "Miss, you'd better look at that note. I have a bomb."

Her eyes get wide but she says nothing. Immediately she fishes in her purse looking for the note.

You watch her face as she does this.

She was once a beauty queen back in Arkansas and you wouldn't have been surprised if someone told you so. Her day had started in Minneapolis, the Northwest Orient Airlines hub, then she flew west landing in Great Falls, Missoula, Spokane, and then Portland. Seattle was supposed to be her last stop of the day and she'd been looking forward to getting a glass of red wine in an airport hotel. But that was not going to happen.

You watch her read the note, which says, I HAVE A BOMB IN MY BRIEFCASE. I WILL USE IT IF NECESSARY. I WANT YOU TO SIT NEXT TO ME. YOU ARE BEING HIJACKED.

Florence finishes reading the note and looks up at you. She moves up and sits in the aisle seat near you. She asks very quietly, “Can I see it?”

Carefully you unlatch the briefcase and open it just enough for her to see inside.<sup>43</sup>

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43

She says, “No” → pg 87

She says nothing at all → pg 122

“Don’t make me shoot you,” she says.

“Okay, I won’t,” you say.

“What are you doing here?”

“Trying to leave.”

“Do you want me to stop pointing this shotgun at you?”

“Yep.”

“Then tell me where you came from.”

“It’s complicated,” you say, pointing up at the sky and maybe the jet that you just jumped out of.

“Try me.”

“How about this, instead of telling you, can I just not tell you?”

She lifts the shotgun up into the crook of her elbow and aims it up at the clouds,

“Fine.”

“I gotta tell you, I did *not* expect that to work.”

“It doesn’t matter. I know you fell out of the sky.”

You get to your feet and try to nonchalantly adjust the money bag across your belly. “And how do you know that?”

“Because we all did. Come with me.”

She turns and begins to walk slowly toward the treeline.<sup>44</sup>

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44

You follow her → pg 170

You run in the opposite direction like a terrified little schoolboy → pg 88

Florence peers into the briefcase. She studies the red cylinders connected by wires to two batteries.

Then she screws up her face and looks right at you, exasperated.

“No,” she says.

“What?” you say.

“I grew up in Arkansas, we dug our basement with dynamite. Dynamite is brown. Those are road flares.”

“Well shit,” you say out loud to her, “I did not expect you to know that.”

On the ground in Seattle you are arrested by US Marshals. You will serve out the rest of your life in a Federal penitentiary. You will be tried and convicted under your real name and no one will have ever heard of D. B. Cooper, because he never happened. You wear your ill-fitting blue uniform and sleep on a threadbare bunk and nobody, not even you, knows that you were almost the last great American outlaw.

Except that didn’t happen. Because Florence Shaffner had never actually seen the dynamite her father used to blow a pit in the ancient Clastic rock of the Ozark Plateau of central Arkansas.

But if she had, you might have been fucked.<sup>45</sup>

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45

That was a lucky break → pg 122

Once her back is turned you are hauling ass in the other direction faster than 1968 Olympic gold medalist Tommie C. Smith, whose bravado you admire. Your knees are kicking high as you run through the tall grass of the clearing.

“HEY!” You hear her shouting behind you, “What the hell are you doing?”

“Sorry sister,” you holler, “I work better alone!”

And then you are into the treeline and on your own. You swing behind a big black tree and try to catch your breath while you look back in her direction. It doesn’t look like she’s following you. Good. The last thing you need is a shotgun-wielding mountain person slowing you down.

You look around and take stock.

Aside from the clearing every other direction is tall dark forest.

Well, you think, if Little Red Riding Hood could do it, so can I.

It is slow going initially. You step through thick underbrush, but that’s better than when you step into mud and it sucks down into your shoes. Who knew that escaping through the forest in the middle of the night in November would be such a pain in the ass?

After a while you start to sing a little under your breath, “*I’m so tired of being alone ... I’m so tired of on my own ... won’t you help me girl ...* hmm, that’s ironic actually ... *Just as soooooon as you caaaa-aaa-aaan ... people say that I’ve found a way ... to make you saa-aay ... that you loooo-ooove meee-eee-eee ...*”

And then you hear the blast.

Maybe not a blast, just a pop at first.

It lights up the forest ahead of you in a flash of white and orange. The trees briefly silhouetted by light. You watch as the ball of fire arcs up high all parabolic above the treetops and then sinks down. Then the ground shutters and there's a distant explosion.

'Now what?' you rush forward faster just as you hear another pop, louder now as you get closer. The trees are beginning to thin out as you move forward and then you see that you are approaching an edge, the ground drops away fast and you see a wide black ocean and sharp ribbons of waves cresting.

The second ball of fire arcs down to the land off to your right and it impacts and bursts open into fire.

You look out at the sea. There is a gray sliver out there in the water. There's another pop of orange light and briefly you can see that it's a submarine on the surface. An old submarine because it has a deck gun of some kind and the deck gun is launching mortar rounds. You watch the third shell whizz down through the air and when it hits, you see now, there is some kind of fort down there.

"What?"

There shouldn't even be an ocean here. "There is *no ocean* between Seattle and Reno!" You yell at the submarine, confident that it can't hear you.

"Shut up you idiot!"

You whirl around but there's no one there.

"Who said that?"

"Me!"

"Who are you? *Where* are you? And what is that ridiculous accent?"

You see his form rise out of the underbrush a few feet off to your right. A big man, maybe 60, super jowly, with a thick head of hair with a really great gray streak running through it. His gray suit is covered in mud because he'd been laying down in the mud. A pair of binoculars in his hands. "It is not a ridiculous accent."

"You sound like you're faking a southern accent."

"I am from Louisiana."

"Ooooh. Yeah, that checks out."

The submarine fires off another shell and you both duck a little.

"So what's with the fireworks?" you ask.

"That's a Japanese submarine. Attacking the base."

"That's a base down there?"

"Boy, that is Fort Stevens."

The ground shutters as the shell lands.

"I'm sorry, can we back up?" you ask.

"Fine."

"Okay," you say, but now you're not sure what to ask.

"Well, go on!"

"I'm thinking."

"You must be new here," he says.

"I just landed a little bit ago. I'm just passing through."

The big man laughs and at first it is hearty but it gets sad by the end. "Listen son, my name is Hale Boggs, I am a U-nited States Congressman from the great state of

Louisiana and so you can believe me when I tell you that you are not wherever you think you are.”

“Story of my life.”

He reaches his big hand out and the two of you shake, “Come on, I’ll show you around.”

You jerk your thumb over your shoulder, “I really have to be going.”

“There’s nowhere to go.”

Another blast and you look out at the submarine lit up all orange. When you look back you see the big fat fist of Congressman Hale Boggs flying at your face and then you don’t see anything at all.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>



“So ... do you ... come here often?”

“To the plane? Where I work? Yes.”

“Well. It seems like interesting work. You get to. You know. Meet interesting people. For very short periods of time. Which is about the right amount of time to know a person. In my experience.”

“You don’t seem that crazy. I mean, not super-duper crazy. For a hijacker, anyway.”

“Have you met a lot of hijackers?”

“No, but more than 100 planes have been hijacked in the last three years. We get trained for it all the time. Everybody always wants to go to Havana because hijackers are always commie nutjobs. You know, Northwest Orient Airlines has strict policies about traveling to Cuba. Can’t bring home rum or cigars. Customs confiscate them at the airport.”

You realize that she is telling you a joke, and how great is that? You laugh. “Well then I guess we had better just stay in Havana. 200 grand will probably buy a nice life there.”

“Or Castro will just shoot you in the head and keep the money.”

“Miss, people were trying to shoot me in the head before I ever even had any money.”

“At least you’ll get to be rich for a minute or two.”

“If I play my cards right I might even get to be rich for three or four.”

“What are you going to do with the parachutes?”

“Jump out of the plane.”

“That’s nuts.”

“Is it nuts? Or just an elegantly simple solution to a complex problem?”

“It’s nuts.”

“OR, is it *simple* and *elegant*?”

“It’s nuts.”

“Simple. And elegant.”

“Why do you need four of them?”

“If they think I’m going to take a hostage with me then the FBI won’t fuck with the parachutes.”

“You think the FBI would try to murder you by fucking with the parachutes?”

“Yes.”

“Me too.”

“Hey, would you light me a cigarette?”

“Why? Can’t you do it?”

“I don’t want to take my hand off this bomb detonator.”

“Right. Of course. Sure.”

“Thanks. So where are you from?”

“Minnesota.”

“Cold. Do you get back there often?”

“I *live* there. I got on this plane when it landed in Minneapolis.”

“The plane doesn’t live in Minneapolis?”

“Today the plane started its route in Washington, DC.”

“And switched out the crew in Minneapolis?”

“Yes.”

“So you woke up in the Twin Cities. Where were you going to go to sleep?”

“Seattle. Probably not anymore though, right?”

“Probably not. Where would you prefer to end up tonight?”

“Anyplace that isn’t between Minneapolis and Seattle or Seattle and Minneapolis.”

“I’ll make you a deal. You help me get off the ground again in Seattle, *alive* and I’ll make sure you end up someplace warm tonight.”

“I’ve gotta tell you, I had been enjoying this back-and-forth, but the whole ‘I’ll make sure you end up someplace warm tonight’ that was a bit much.”

“You know, I didn’t even feel good as I was saying it. I felt gross.”

“It’s just corny.”

“I really do apologize.”

“Do you really think they’ll try to kill you in Seattle?”

“Yeah.”

“What are the chances they kill me too?”

“Well Miss, honestly, if I’m dead, you probably are too.”

“Right.”

“For better or worse, for tonight, we need to keep each other alive.”

“I get that, but if they rush the plane I’m not exactly going to throw my body in front of you or anything.”

“That’s fair. I can respect that.”

“Do you want another drink?”

“My god yes.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>

Go to → pg 105

You pull the flare gun from your waistband and swing it around. You squeeze off the flare just as the claw is coming down.

The flare screams and flies into the creature's chest, exploding in a huge red blast of heat and fire.

But the big arms are flailing at the air now and the giant Bigfoot comes tumbling down off of the dock and lands, burning, right on top of you in the boat.

You are screaming and burning and kicking and so is the Bigfoot on top of you.

This is the worst death you could ever think of: D. B. Cooper, America's last modern folk hero, crushed and burned to death by a flaming Bigfoot.

01. Everything presented here as fact is actually fact. Except for the things which aren't.
02. "The book is really more about thought than plot." Lydia Davis (Olsen)
03. On November 24th 1971, a man wearing a dark out-of-fashion business suit and sunglasses hijacked a plane leaving Portland Airport.
04. On D. B. Cooper's double nature: "He represented something very potent in that moment. He became a sort of counter-culture hero, a bad guy who even the good guys wanted to get away. He was a sort of sky pirate, a bizarro Robin Hood. He was able to, as an individual, overtake these big complex things called airplanes, this big complex thing called law enforcement, and make away with a fortune at a time when the country was in a recession and a cultural civil war. The problem from a factual point of view, though, is that Cooper was made into this cultural hero. And the truth is that the guy who hijacked the plane and the guy who everyone thinks hijacked the plane are two totally different people." Geoffrey Gray (Turner).
05. The hijacker claimed to have a bomb. He demanded \$200,000 and four parachutes.
06. "Conventional fiction teaches the reader that life is a coherent, fathomable whole that concludes in neatly wrapped-up revelation. Life though— standing on a street corner, channel surfing, trying to navigate the web or declining a relationship, hearing that a close friend died last night— flies at us in bright splinters." Lance Olsen (Olsen).

07. For two and a half hours the plane circled over Puget Sound while the FBI collected ten thousand \$20 bills.
08. “Samuel R. Delany once proposed science fiction is a tool to help us think. The same could be said for innovative narrativity. A tool, perhaps, to help us re-think, re-feel, re-perceive, as well. All narrativity, innovative or not, is also about change, about creating in yourself and your readers the sense we have been somewhere, transitioned from one condition to another. In conventional narrative— whether story, film, video game, poem, or other mode— that may mean moving through fast-paced plot toward a conclusion that nearly ties together loose ends. In innovative narrative, that may mean instead moving through complex language display or investigation of structural opportunities.” Lance Olsen (Olsen).
09. The plane landed at Seattle Airport and the hijacker was given the money and parachutes, at which point he released the passengers, who had not known they were hostages.
10. “Story seems to say that everything happens for a reason, and I want to say, No, it doesn’t.” James Joyce (Shields).
11. Back in the air over the Pacific Northwest, the hijacker parachutes out of the plane with the money.
12. “You don’t make art; you find it.” Charles Simic (Shields).
13. The hijacker has never been apprehended. The hijacker has never been found. The hijacker has never been positively identified. The hijacker remains completely unknown.

14. “Or as Nietzsche put it: ‘In heaven all the interesting people are missing.’ Place your protagonist in danger (thereby creating conflict), and everyone will want to know what happens next. That doesn’t mean dynamite and car crashes in every paragraph. Subtle psychological conflict is usually much more tempting for readers— at least grownup ones— than the overt, hyperbolic, physical kind.” Lance Olsen (Olsen).
15. The hijacker’s FBI file is more than forty volumes long. More than 1,000 suspects have been investigated— ranging from cat burglars to green berets to post-op transsexuals— over the 45 year active lifespan of the case.
16. “The only way I’ve found I can live, literally, is by carving out my own space between the interstices of fiction and non-.” David Shields (Shields).
17. The crime itself is now approaching middle-age.
18. “Story and plot, by the way, are two different concepts, although most of us use the terms interchangeably. In his groundbreaking book on fiction writing, *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster defines the former as “a narrative of events in their time-sequence” and the latter as ‘a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.’ More plainly, story is a series of events in chronological order. Plot is a series of events deliberately arranged for maximum dramatic, thematic, emotional intensity. Story, that is, is the stuff of the world. Plot is the stuff of fiction. Story is event. Plot is event shaped.” Lance Olsen (Olsen).
19. How then might one write the story of the hijacking without knowing the hijacker?
20. “To be exhaustive and correct is of course an infinite task.” Lydia Davis (Olsen).



21. Mysteries demand resolutions, just as crimes demand to be solved. Just as plots demand to be resolved. Just as some stories demand to be told even while they remain irresolvable.
22. “If you grow up not with toys bought in the shop but things that are found around the farm, you do a sort of bricolage. Bits of string and wood. Making all sorts of things, like webs across the legs of a chair. And then you sit there, like the spider. The urge to connect bits that don’t seem to belong together has fascinated me all my life.” W. G. Sebald (Shields).
23. Perhaps the story of the hijacker and the story of the hijacking need not necessarily be the *same* story. But Keats asked: *How can we know the dancer from the dance?*
24. “All art in a sense an act of rebellion (...) art creates the world as it ought to be, and therefore is a protest of the world as it is, although I find plenty in the world to celebrate as it is.” Tom Robbins (Purdon).
25. Of the hijacker almost nothing is known. Of the hijacking, nearly everything is known, but for the identity of the hijacker.
26. “I’m talking about a pointillist technique, where what you get is not adjacent dots of yellow and blue, which optically merge to give you green, but merged meanings, whether from words placed side by side in a seemingly arbitrary way or phrases similarly arrayed, bushels of them.” Lance Olsen (Olsen).
27. The story of the hijacking exists in the FBI file, in the statements of flight attendants and pilots, in the lives of the 1,000 plus suspects who were investigated, in the lives of the hundreds of agents who did the investigating. The

plot of the hijacking becomes the latent possibility of all of the potential versions of all the potential hijackings and in their mutual ability to cancel out one another, leaving behind a mystery which is both similar to and yet very different than the original mystery.

28. *"The End of the Story* by Lydia Davis. That book showed me that a novel can daringly disregard expectations about story structure and still feel full of passion and urgency. And a novel can talk about itself and not feel cute. And a novel can be about only one thing, one thought. It doesn't have to show the universe. One thought is a world." Deb Olin Unferth (Olsen).
29. The first four books of the New Testament disagree about the order of events and also about the events themselves. To combined and organize them into one coherent story would not serve to eliminate their mysteries, but to write a whole new book.
30. "Incoherence is preferable to a distorting order." Roland Barthes (Shields).
31. To write a mystery that one has no intention of solving is to promise the audience a magic trick that one cannot actually perform, which is to risk a mutiny. The magician then, must be prepared to perform a wholly different magic trick. Redirection via misdirection.
32. "A mosaic, made out of broken dishes, makes no attempt to hide the fact that it's made out of broken dishes, in fact flaunts it." Julian Schnabel (Shields).
33. On the plane that night a flight attendant claimed to have seen the hijacker's bomb. She said that it was in a briefcase, that it was made of 8 red sticks of dynamite.

34. “Collage is pieces of other things. Their edges don’t meet.” Nina Michelson (Shields).
35. However dynamite is not red.
36. “The main question collage artists face: you’ve found some interesting material—how do you go about arranging it?” Charles Simic (Shields).
37. At least four people have made deathbed confessions claiming to be the hijacker.  
A half dozen men already in prison have confessed to being the hijacker.
38. “From the early days of webcams to today’s rapid-fire Twitter blasts, we’ve constructed and projected certain notions of who we are through a process of accumulating seemingly insignificant and ephemeral gestures.” Kenneth Goldsmith (Goldsmith).
39. We all already speak the language of accumulated meaning:
- a. The mix tape. The mix CD. The Spotify playlist.
  - b. The cigarette butt in Jackson Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five*, (This title taken from *The Tempest*, describing the long loneliness of death by shipwreck:  
Full fathom five thy father lies / Of his bones are coral made / Those are pearls that were his eyes.)
  - c. The movie montage; Rocky on the steps of Philadelphia.
  - d. The tumblr page, *The Same Picture of Dave Coulier Every Day*, which posts the exact same picture of *Full House* actor Dave Coulier at 8:30am every single day, weekends and holidays, through rain, snow, sleet, and hail.
  - e. Twitter.

f. The multiple systems of information delivery operating side-by-side and simultaneously on every single webpage.

g. “Assemblage bricolage, collage, collection, compilation, montage, mosaic.

40. If every word spoken in New York City daily were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard.” Kenneth Goldsmith (Goldsmith)

41. The FBI believes the hijacker did not survive the jump.

42. “There are no facts, only art.” Ralph Waldo Emerson (Shields)

43. The FBI kept the case open for 45 years.<sup>48</sup>

Zoltan Basternak?

Really?

Does that really seem like a real fake name you would use if you're about to become the most wanted man in America?

Zoltan?

*Basternak?*

Look, if you aren't going to take this seriously then what is the point?<sup>49</sup>

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49

Fine! Then I will go with Dan → pg 187

Fine! Then I will go with D. B. Cooper → 114

No. I am sticking with Zoltan → pg 2

Circling Puget Sound northwest of Seattle, a 36 minute flight from Portland to Seattle has stretched to more than two hours.

Captain William Scott's voice came over the intercom announcing that the delay was caused by a minor mechanical malfunction, which was perhaps less comforting to the passengers than the truth might have been.

"Is he kidding me with this?" you ask Tina when she brings you another drink.

She sits and lights you another cigarette, "Would you rather he said that the guy in the back of the plane is threatening to blow you up?"

"Well, no."

You have been getting antsy. Because there are people on the ground making plans about you. You alternate drinking and smoking with your left hand. You look out the window at the lights on the ground far below you. "That looks like Tacoma down there."

"I think so, yeah."

One of the passengers moves down the aisle, on his way to the rear lavatory. His name is Jack Almstad. At this point the passengers do not know that they have been hijacked. Jack waits for the bathroom, carefully eyeing Tina's thighs and looking at you with a little envy. "If this keeps up much longer," he says to you, "they can serve us our turkey dinners up here."

You and Tina laugh falsely as Jack slips into the lavatory.

"Other people really are hell," Tina says.

"He was totally checking you out."

“Everyone checks me out. It’s 1971 and I’m still not allowed to decide for myself how much of my own thighs to cover or not.”

“You should lodge a complaint with management.”

“I would do that, but I am currently being held hostage.”

“Are you getting a little stir crazy, *Miss*?”

“Aren’t you?”

“Perhaps you would like to go ask the Captain what’s happening on the ground.”

“I will do that for you, and also for me.”

“Thank you.”

As Tina moves up toward the cockpit you think to yourself that if you were not someone threatening her life and the lives of all her coworkers, that you might ask her out to dinner. Maybe one day you’ll be able to. Not right away, obviously. But maybe one day you might come back, after all this has blown over. Once you have a new name and your own little cabin on a piece of land somewhere. Maybe it would be good for you to have someone in your life. Someone you could be honest with, because she makes you want to tell her everything. You want so much to slice yourself open and let someone see what’s inside of you.

Then you see Tina coming back from the cockpit and you see her for what she is. She’s twenty-two years old and doing her best. You’re almost twice her age and you can’t sleep through the night. You’re an angry old man who she likes a little bit because she hasn’t yet lived long enough to meet better people or to know any better.

Tina leans down into your row and whispers close to your ear, “Captains says the money and parachutes are waiting for us on the ground.”<sup>50</sup>

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50

You say: “Let’s get this show on the road!” → pg 176

You say: “Wait just one minute.” → pg 116



“Do you see the submarine?” Jimmy calls over the engine noise.

Amelia and I scan the dark ocean waters rippling around us.

“No,” Amelia calls back.

“Where the hell is it?” I shout.

“Hale was the one who kept track of where it surfaces,” Amelia says.

Jimmy cuts the engine and you drift silently along. “Do you hear something?” he asks.

You all listen. You all look.

There are bubbles coming up in the water around you. As though the sea itself is starting to boil.

“What the hell?” you say.

Then there are more bubbles. And then behind you something begins to slide up out of the black water. It is narrow and round and spiky and metallic. Then another and another begin to rise out of the water. Antennas and a periscope. Then the giant long sail of a submarine begins to lift out of the water behind you. Then as you all peer over the sides of your little boat, you see the big metal whale shape lifting up out of the darkness below you. The flat top of its steel hull hits the bottom of your boat and you are lifted out of the water. You are sitting in a row boat on the back of a 350 foot long Japanese submarine.

“Okay,” Jimmy says, “that worked out.”

You all leap out. You’re looking at the giant deck gun between you and the conning sail. “This is fucking awesome,” you say.

“Where’s the plane?” Jimmy asks.

“In front of the sail, it’s in a little hangar.” Amelia leads the way as you all rush around the sail, the top of which hangs two stories above you in the night sky.

The front of the submarine has a long cylindrical enclosed hangar, the bow angles upward sharply to help the prop plane take off. To one side of the ramp there’s a giant motorized winch for lifting the seaplane from the water when it lands next to the sub and replacing it in the hangar.

Amelia is pulling open the doors of the hangar. You peer inside. It is a very small plane. A single prop engine and two fat float skis. Not much else to it. It’s wings are folded up and back along its own fuselage.

“How do we get it out?” Jimmy asks.

“I’m working on it,” Amelia says, looking over the control panel inside the door.

Then we hear a clank. Steel on steel. It is distant, up above us. Up on the conning tower.

“That sounded like a hatch opening,” Jimmy says to you.

There are human voices coming from up there. Speaking Japanese, but not excited. Not yelling. Not like voices that are yet aware of intruders.

“Be very quiet,” Jimmy says.

A loud engine starts up. A roar and a whirring.

“I got it!” Amelia calls.

The mechanics of the catapult ramp have begun pulling the plane out of the hangar.

The voices up at the top of the conning sail are louder now. Now they are quite alarmed. A human face pops over the edge of the sail and peers down at you.

You wave, limply.

The face disappears and there is very serious shouting up there now.

An alarm begins to below, a klaxon down inside the submarine.

“Time to go!” you shout.

Amelia has one of the wings unfolded into place. She climbs up onto the wing and slides open the long glass cockpit. She bends down inside and fiddles with the controls. The plane’s engine coughs and then catches. The prop on the front of the plane begins to spin. She leaps down, rolls under the plane and then stands to begin lowering the other wing.

A gunshot rings out from above. A bullet ricochets off the steel deck and right past your head. Jimmy aims his own gun up and fires back. You pull the flare gun from your belt and aim it up that way too, not quite sure what good it will do.

“Do not fire that!” Jimmy yells, “You will light us up for them!”

You lower it and yell, “Where’s the shotgun?” You turn back toward Amelia, who has the other wing down now. You look at her and then at the fully unfolded and extended plane. It is not a very big plane.

“Jimmy,” you say over the engine noise, “that plane only has two seats in it ...”

As you turn back you see that Jimmy has his revolved pointed right at your gut.

“Sorry Cooper,” he says.

You have to think quick.<sup>51</sup>

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51

You decide to use the flare gun → pg 118

You decide to use your wits → pg 115

Yes, you have broken laws already today.

But no one knows that yet.

Right now there are two possible versions of the rest of your life.

In one version - the one you have planned for - you signal the stewardess, you give her the note from your pocket which explains that you have a bomb. The moment she reads the note you become a sky pirate and that is something you can never un-become. Live or die, you will always be that.

That moment when she reads the note, there will be a distant but very loud noise in your ears. It will be the slamming of a door. What was on the other side of that door? On the other side of that door is a remainder of your life which is still available to you. It is the life of a non-sky pirate. It is a life without an extra \$200,000 in it. It is a life where you can't buy a house or any peace. It is a small life, but one the FBI will never know about. You can land in Seattle in 35 minutes and get off the plane. You have enough money to take a taxi to a cheap motel. Along the way you can make a few stops. You can pick up a big bottle of gin and the shortest rifle you can buy easily. Or maybe a little .38 Special. It is 1971 in America and there are no laws against selling firearms to half-drunk war veterans who can't sleep. You can turn on the TV in the motel room. Maybe watch the news and finish the rest of the bottle. You can load all six chambers, or maybe just 2 or 3, so the gun can decide when you put it in your mouth.

At least the dreams will stop and you can sleep through the nights, all of them from now on.

You think of Sarge and what he was thinking about during every millisecond as the bullet went tunneling through his brain. He did it with the barrel pressed straight

against his forehead, so after the slug cut through his skull, it barreled through the Frontal lobe so he would have first lost his sense of smell, his ability to speak, and his ability to plan ahead. It split the tissue between his Temporal and Parietal lobes, so he would have lost the ability to hear before the sound of the gunshot got to his ears. He would have lost the ability to feel or to touch. If somehow in that moment he'd been able to raise his fingers to the fresh hole in the center of his forehead, the nerves in his fingertips would be sending a signal to his brain that he could no longer process. The bullet continued through the Occipital lobe at the back of his head causing his vision to cut out to black. If the bullet had stopped there, he would have been left deaf, blind, mute, and unable to feel his own body, he would have been left only with the long term memories stored down in and around the hippocampus back behind his eyes. He would have been left with nothing but the memories he'd hoped to finally be free of.

But the bullet hadn't stopped.

It bore a hole through the back of his skull and burst out in a geyser of pink and red and gray mist. The bullet sailed free in the air for a moment before it lodged in the far cinderblock wall of his basement, which is where it still sits today, though his wife has since hung a picture of him over the hole.

Sitting alone in a Seattle motel room, maybe you would have taken the gun out of your mouth, maybe you would suddenly feel sorry for whatever poor person would have to stand on the mattress and mop your brain off the ceiling. Maybe you would put the gun under the mattress and try to sleep it off. Maybe you would wake up with a nasty hangover, a loaded gun, and an unexploded bomb in your briefcase.

What does one even do on a morning like that?

So it would seem, the safest thing you can possibly do at this moment on this plane a few thousand feet above Portland, Oregon is to stick to the plan.

The plan might get you killed too, but at least you have a plan.<sup>52</sup>

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52

You turn to signal Florence Shaffner → pg 84

No, actually the skyjacker known as “D. B. Cooper” never used that name.

The origin of that name is much disputed. A United Press International reporter named Clyde Jabin would claim that he got the name from an FBI file clerk. Several Associated Press reporters would claim that they overheard the name from Seattle police working the case. D. B. Cooper was already the name of a Seattle cat burglar who would be interrogated on Thanksgiving morning. On tomorrow’s CBS News Walter Cronkite will mistakenly refer to you as D. A. Cooper. The FBI chose to never publicly correct any of the mistakes in order to make it easier to tell the false tips from the genuine ones.

The suspect in the only unsolved skyjacking in American history isn’t even properly named. Much about the case is like this.

You filled out the ticket by writing in big block letters: *DAN COOPER*.<sup>53</sup>

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53

Fine, my name is Dan now → pg 186

“Jimmy, you’re out of bullets. I counted.”

“Nice try,” he squeezes the trigger but it clicks hollow on an empty chamber.

“Shit,” he says.

“Holy shit,” you say.

Then you land a fist across the side of his face and - your brain does one of those odd freeze frames of the life you have chosen to lead and you think to yourself, *I am fistfighting with Jimmy Hoffa on top of a Japanese submarine. This is the whole reason I spent all that time devising an elegant, non-violent crime that I could pull off myself. Other people just make things ridiculous* - he staggers backward, his heel catching the edge of a deck plane and he loses his balance, tumbling end over end down the round side of the submarine and he splashes down into the cold dark water below.<sup>54</sup>

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54



You ask Tina to sit back down and light you another cigarette. You fill your chest with the smoke until you're nothing but a balloon and you exhale up into the cloud of smoke already hanging like faint cloud cover along the ceiling of the cabin. Two hours of drinking and smoking has turned the plane into a hot sweaty nightclub.

Your hand is trembling a little as you lift the cigarette back to your lips and out of the corner of your eye you notice Tina notice it.

You wonder what she's wondering.

"Hey," she says, "do you like music?"

That's an odd question. "Yeah," you say, "I like music."

"Have you heard that new song on the radio?" Quietly she starts to sing it a little, "Byyyyye byyyyye Miss American Piiiie. Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levy was dry ..."

"Them good old boys," you croon a little, "were drinkin' whiskey and rye, singin' this'll be the day that I die."

"You know what that song is about?"

"No."

"It's about people who die in a plane crash. But I still come to work everyday. And lately I've been singing it to myself during takeoff."

"Why'd you tell me that?"

She takes the cigarette out of your hand and drags on it.

She tips her head back and stretches her neck out long and blows a chimney of smoke up into the cabin.

“No matter what,” she says handing it back to you, “we’re all going to die some day. And we have absolutely no control over it. So let’s get this done. Let’s get your money so I can go home.”

“Okay,” you say, “let’s get this show on the road.”<sup>55</sup>

The flare gun isn't even pointed at anything when you pull the trigger. It's aimed vaguely down. It bucks in your hand and the bright red streak bounces off the steel deck, careens off the bottom of the plane, hits the deck again and veers up into the air, where it explodes like a bright red supernova.

Jimmy fires, but he missed because you've thrown yourself to the deck. As he brings his pistol around, you land a swift kick to his knee and he shrieks and collapses onto his side. You kick him again in the gut and he tries to roll away from you, but as he does he goes over the flat edge of the deck, he tumbles down along the round side of the submarine and he splashes down into the cold dark water below.<sup>56</sup>

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56

Go to → pg 80

Until last year when Nixon announced it on television, no one knew that the US had been secretly waging war on the ground and in the sky over Cambodia.

Before 1970 no one on the ground in America yet knew that the war had metastasized beyond the western border of Vietnam into Cambodia and Laos.

That American bombs and soldiers were raining into jungles all over the map of Southeast Asia. You think about Sarge a lot, who became something like a father figure to you out there, and the time he yelled at the static TV in a Saigon bar, "What do you even say anymore about a country whose biggest export is killing people?"

But there were real men like you who were dropping those bombs and flying those planes and there were men like you parachuting out the back of Boeing 727-100s operated by CIA's Air America program.

In 1971 there were men all over Vietnam - and some who had survived and come home - who knew all about the capabilities of the plane, about how low and how slow it could fly. There were men who had parachuted out of exactly this airplane at night in foul weather and into the dense jungles of Cambodia. Men who had been trained to do it, to land on the ground and escape and evade, indefinitely. Men who had made a jump exactly like the one you will be making in about 6 hours. Men who had been taught and trained to do only 2 things: accomplish their mission, and survive.

Perhaps then you thought about how pretty and terrifying the lush green wilds of Cambodia had looked slipping by below you as you'd gazed down an open airstair with a military parachute and sixty pounds of gear strapped to your own body.

Perhaps you thought about how many times you had flown on this exact plane. How many times you had boarded this exact plane. Perhaps you thought about how

strange it was that this damn airplane kept coming up in your life. About how the two of you had somehow been bound together in a way that - in the whole scope of life - was simultaneously both profound and meaningless.

Perhaps that's what you thought about before you turned back and boarded the plane.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>

You throw your body sideways into the water and you start swimming away as fast as your can, your arms in huge wide strokes, your legs kicking wildly.

Even under water you can hear the shotgun blast. And then there is a giant tumbling splash next to you as the Bigfoot falls into the water, thrashing and spouting a cloud of blood.

You pop your head up to the surface, gasping for air. The Bigfoot behind you is screeching and clawing at you.

“Take my hand!” Amelia is on the dock above you, reaching down.

You grab her wrist and she grabs yours. You’ve never loved another human being more. Jimmy is there too, grabbing your arm, they’re lifting you up onto the dock. You sprawl on your back, sucking in air like a fish.

“No time for that!” Amelia yells, dashing toward the end of the dock where Jimmy has an outboard motor running.

Jimmy hops back down into the boat, so does Amelia, you leap down after her and the boat is already in motion, Jimmy aiming the bow out to the dark horizon.<sup>58</sup>

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58

Florence says nothing as she studies the batteries connected by wire to red cylinders.

You carefully close the briefcase.

In a soft voice you ask her to give you back the note. It is evidence now and you can't have that.

"I want you to write down my demands," you tell her.

"Demands?" she asks.

"Yeah, write down what I tell you and then take it to the cockpit so they can call it in."

"I don't need to write it down."

"I would prefer if you did."

"I take orders all day, I can remember it."

"Fine," you say, annoyed, "I want two hundred thousand dollars in negotiable American currency. Put it in a knapsack. I want two back chutes *and* I want two front chutes. I want a fuel truck on the ground at Sea-Tac when we land. I do not want to land until the money and the parachutes and the fuel are waiting for us. Until then I want the plane to circle Puget Sound. I will release the passengers on the ground *after* I have been given the money, the chutes, and the fuel. And no funny stuff, or I'll do the job."

You have been practicing this speech for days and are quite proud of yourself.

"Oh," Florence says, "that was more than I thought. I should write that down."

You repeat it slowly as she scratches it all out with trembling hands. You want to say, "It will all be okay" but you have absolutely no reason to believe that.

You watch Florence walk away up the aisle headed the cockpit.

Whenever your unit started taking fire, Sarge would always roar over the *KLAKLAKLAKLAKLAKLAKLAKLAKLAKLAK* of too-near machine guns, “This show is really on the road now!”

You carefully study Florence’s backside as she goes. You’d never admit it, but you find calm pleasure in watching the long slim legs of the woman you just terrified. You light up a cigarette because it is 1971 and you can smoke on airplanes over America and you say to yourself, “This show is really on the road now.”<sup>59</sup>



A few weeks ago you saw a movie about singing Russian Jews called called *Fiddler on the Roof*. You didn't know anything about singing Russian Jews or that the movie was based on a musical, but you had a casual lady friend who was very pretty and who never asked about why some nights you woke up screaming to Sarge about incoming mortar fire, about how you're bleeding, about *Sarge please don't let me die*.

It is 1971 and you haven't been back stateside that long and your lady friend didn't ask much of you, but she did like going to movies and even though the price of a ticket had gone up to \$1.65 apiece while you were deployed, you took her to anything she wanted to see and she wanted to see that singing movie.

There was a song in it that had stuck in your head and you haven't been able to shake it. In the movie it started when the old man was out in his barn and he said, "To death. Oh dear Lord, you made many many poor people. I realize, of course, it is no shame to be poor. But it's no great honor either" and then he went on to talk with God for a second about how he would have preferred to have a fortune. Then he began to sing and the song he began to sing had a chorus that went, "If I were a rich man ..." and then mostly the rest of the song was just a list of things he would do with his money. He wants a big tall house with a long staircase going up and an even longer one coming back down, "and one more leading nowhere, just for show." And sitting in the theater that night, with your hand on your lady friend's thigh you thought to yourself, "Nobody needs all that. All I need is enough to set life back right again. All I need is enough."

Then you spent the rest of the movie doing some math in your head. A little piece of land somewhere far away from anybody. A little house, maybe just a cabin even. With a couple good rifles you could hunt most of your food. You were already a better shot

with a scoped rifle than you'd ever wanted to be. In the warm months you could keep a garden and hoe a field of beans like Thoreau had written about. You have some small benefits from the Army, but you don't want to ever rely on the Army for anything, you had learned that.

You figured out that night in the theater that all you would really need was about \$200,000 to set yourself up for good, for the rest of your life. Really that's not even that much money if you think about it. And this country really did owe you something. All these people, all these companies, everybody had been making money while you'd been faraway getting your ass shot off. Somebody really owed you something and two hundred grand wasn't too much to ask for.

"If I were a rich man ..." you whisper to yourself standing there in Portland the day before Thanksgiving, just before boarding the plane.<sup>60</sup>

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60

Every single eye witness on Flight 305 placed the hijacker's age at 40 years or more.

In 1971 Robert Rackstraw was only 28 years old.<sup>61</sup>

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61

Dammit! I thought we had him. Take me back to the suspects → pg 46  
Maybe he was an old 28! I want to know about his jump → pg 41

As you descend through the air you reflect on how today your life has become ridiculous, bordering on dumb.

Finally your feet hit the ground.

You have stuck the landing with the precision and grace of a doped up Soviet gymnast because you are just that smooth of a criminal.

It is night and you are standing in a forest clearing wearing a soaking wet black business suit and a parachute harness. Your white halo of silk sinks to the ground behind you.

You have \$200,000 in cash in a sack tied around your waist.

It is dark.

It is stormy.

It is 1971 and you have just become the most wanted man in America.

You unclip and let the parachute harness drop to the ground.

You reach into the inner pocket of your blazer and pull out the crumpled pack of Raleigh cigarettes. You shake them until one slides out that isn't broken. You put it between your lips and notice that your hands are still shaking a little. You fish the zippo out of your pants pocket. It makes that great series of noises - the metal flip and the clicks of the wheel - and it lights on the first try, just like it always has for you.

Deep, you inhale.

Deeper than that.

Yeah, there it is.

The FBI may kill you one day, but they'll never be able to take this moment away.

Quite possibly the best moment of your life.

Quite possibly the best moment of anyone's life.

You take another drag and it fills you up full inside your whole body. Like you inflate for just a moment. You exhale long and slow but you're still inflated. It isn't smoke that has filled you. It is pride. It is joy. It is a sense of accomplishment wider than the whole Milky Way. You are made of nothing but minerals and water and supernova dust and look what you still did. You won.

You drag down on the rest of your cigarette and you think of nothing but how fantastic you are. Because you are.

That's when you hear the noise.

Behind you.

Soft at first.

So soft that you don't react because you don't know if they know you heard it. The empty sound of something moving like a hole through the rain.

You raise the cigarette back up to your lips and you notice your hand is shaking differently now. Shoulda brought a gun, you think.

You don't want to blink because you can feel whatever it is looking at the back of your head and not blinking.

"Okay," You finally say out loud as you drop the cigarette and mash it into the mud with the tip of your shoe, "I'm going to turn around now ..."

You turn.<sup>62</sup>

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62

In the darkness you see a human face → pg 86

In the darkness you see a very not human face → pg 136

Back in the air, sliding south down the Vector 23 air corridor above Tacoma, you ask Tina to show you how to operate the aftstair. Standing together in the narrow space behind the final row of seats, you can smell whatever she used to wash her hair that morning in Minneapolis, which is a place that seems so far away right now that maybe it doesn't even exist anymore.

She pulls open the doorway and the sound from the jet engine a foot above the ceiling panel is deafening. A dragon's shriek. The air in the little room is warmer than in the cabin. You peer in. With the stairs up, the steps lead up to nothing but a flat steel plate. Like a stairway in a mystery house.

"That's the aftstair!" she shouts over the roar.

"Yeah, I know!" you shout back.

Tina pushes the door closed and then points to the control panel on the wall by the rear lavatory door where the light and PA system is controlled.

"Just make sure the panel is on, here. Then set this switch to AUTO and hold it there."

"That's it?"

"How come you're so sure the plane can take off with the aftstair down, but you don't actually know how to put the aftstair down?"

You don't answer.

Tina slips out of the tight area by the door, stepping back into the cabin.

You glance at your watch and then go peer out the nearest window. You gaze down into the clouds and the dark forest down below you.

*Almost there.*

You turn back to her and realize she has been studying you. Maybe you should say, "Hey, would it be okay if I look you up after all this blows over?" but you don't say that because when you actually look at her - really look at her - you can see how tired she is. You wonder what else the pilots may have told her over the phone on the ground. Does she know about a chase plane right behind you? Does she know that the FBI has already decided that no matter what, no one is ever going to find your body? Did they tell her that the smartest thing you could do was set a timer on the bomb and blow up the plane right after you jump? For just a moment you realize that - despite your considerable charm - this has been a hell of a day for her.

"You know what," you say, "why don't you go up front. Close the first class curtain on the way."

She folds her arms across her chest. Her lips are pressed together very tightly. You think that she wants to say, "Are you sure?" only she doesn't say that because it's all done for her now. She's just a stewardess again and you're just a hijacker again.

"Thank you," you say.

She turns around and walks up to the cockpit, closing the first class curtain on her way.

You life the bank bag by the handle you made and start tying it on across your belly. You step into one of the parachute harnesses and lift it up onto your back. You clip it on and cinch the straps. You pull on the remaining front chute. You grab your briefcase and set it by the aftstair door.

You pull the door open.

You flip the control panel on and take a deep breath. In through the nose, out between your lips. You put your thumb on the button and hold it down.

There is a mechanical whirring and the stairs begin to hinge down. The rush and blast of wind is louder than the jet engine above you. It is freezing cold and you can hear the hydraulic whine of the stairs levering down into the bumpy airstream of a thunderstorm a mile and a half in the sky.

As they lower into place you are gazing down through the mouth of the stairway and where you would ordinarily see tarmac, you see gray wisps of clouds sliding by below you, with mountains, some of them very close, passing along below those.

Quickly you kick the briefcase, it tumbles down the first few steps, then gets snatched up by the wind and jerks off the end of the stairs and out into the night. It happened too fast for you to gauge anything about the wind except that there's a lot of it.

You reach out and put your hand on the metal railing. Then the other. You take your first step down. You can feel the stairway sink under your weight and for a half second you think you may be falling already, but you're not.

The blast of the wind is freezing cold on your cheeks and you have to narrow your eyes. The rain in the air is furious fast enough that it's peppering your face as the slipstream whips it up the stairway.

You take another step down. You move your hands again down the rails and take another step down. Then another. You're far enough down now that on either side of you there is nothing but the sky. Clouds are sliding by on either side of you. Out ahead of you the white moonlight is bouncing off the tops of the storm clouds. The snowy faces of the Cascade Mountains are gray and purple in the storm. Below you, through breaks in the



clouds you can see the sharp toothpick fields of pine trees. Down there you can see a flat blue opal of a lake, a set of glowing lights marking the dam at its far end.

The fury sounds of the sky and the rumble of the engine are bleeding now into a wall of impossibly loud nothing noise that's shaking your whole body. There's a crack of lighting directly in front of you and for just that moment you can see it all, the forest, the mountains, every drop of rain. This is the last moment you have to contemplate the smallness of a single person compared to the vastness of such a dark world.

You're holding onto the handrails so tightly that your hands are already hurting. The wind buffets your legs, claws at your shins.

You take a deep breath and make the only decision you can.

You let the muscles of your fingers loosen and then you fall forward into the sky.<sup>63</sup>

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63

Go to → pg 60

You pull your body into a fetal ball, waiting for the strike to come.

Then there is a sound. A crack and blast of fire. You know that sound, its what the sun sounds like if you stand too close. It's a shotgun and it lights up the night just like the lightning.

And then just the fast wet sounds of the monster dashing away through the mud and grass.

You sit up in the clearing still clutching the money.

“Yeah you better run!” you shout after the creature.

Behind you there are footsteps. Soft human steps and when you turn to look you see a very tall very thin silhouette stepping through the clearing toward you, shotgun held calmly at waist-level, about where your head is.

She circles you. She stands over you.

You look up into her face.<sup>64</sup>

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64

You step onto the plane.

You look around. You know all about the plane.

Flight 305 is actually The Boeing Company 727-100, line#137, tail number N467US. It weighs 80,602 pounds, empty. It has 3 Pratt & Whitney JT8D-1 jet engines capable of producing 14,000 pound force thrust each. It has a maximum cruising speed of Mach 0.9. It is 133 feet 2 inches long. It has a wingspan of 108 feet 0 inches. It can carry 7,680 gallons of jet fuel and has a fully-laden operational range of 2,300 nautical miles. The cabin is 11 feet 6 inches wide. The plane is flown by 2 pilots and a flight engineer, all of them men on this flight. The passengers are serviced by 3 flight attendants, all of them young women on this flight.

You step calmly down the center aisle. There are 14 seats in first class. Large seats, two on each side of the aisle. This area is serviced by a stewardess named Alice Hancock.

You continue past the galley on the starboard side. Here there are 3 seats on either side of the aisle. The other passengers are settling in. This area of the cabin over the wings is handled by a 22-year-old stewardess named Tina Mucklow.

You continue toward the back. You can see the pressure sealed door to the airstair at the back of the cabin. This area at the rear of the cabin is handled by a stewardess with a dark, sharp bob cut. Her name is Florence Schaffner. You slip into seat 18C. It is 4 rows from the airstair. There is no one seated behind you. You sit on the aisle so you can see all the way up the length of the plane.

They seal the forward port side door and the plane quickly begins to taxi.

Minutes later the nose points straight down the runway. The engines begin to whine up loud. You can feel every bump and fissure in the tarmac and just like every other time you have flown in your life, you close your eyes. You don't pray. You've never prayed, but just before the speed and wind and fuel burning at galactic temperatures lifts you from the earth you have always asked yourself, "Maybe I should pray?"

Then you feel the lift as the tires come off the tarmac and you are doing something that less than 1% of all the humans who have ever lived have done; you are flying.

You open your eyes.

You set your hand on your briefcase.

You consider that you may never touch the ground again while alive.

"Okay," you say to yourself quietly, "let's get this show on the road."<sup>65</sup>

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65

You signal to Florence Shaffner → pg 84

You have second thoughts → pg 111

Its eyes are big and yellow. Bright against the darkness of the treeline where it's shadow shape is hunched down.

It is *looking* at you.

You can hear its breathing. Not the *bump-bump* breathing of a human heart. This is ragged, hungry breathing. It makes a low rumbling guttural growl. Then it starts to stand. It's shape is just body darkness rising against night darkness. It keeps rising. It is not yet upright. It is huge. It has big arms that hang long down it's sides. Bigger than a man. Bigger than a bear. It is upright and nine feet tall. It is still *looking* at you.

You say, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars not to eat me."

As its mouth opens you can see the fat pointy tips of its teeth.

"Should I run away? Is that how this usually goes?"

Then it leaps! Out of the treeline, into the clearing, fast toward you. You are running as fast as you can in the other direction. Out across the clearing. You can hear its giant feet smack-smack-smack on the ground behind you.

The money bag is banging up and down as you run. You run.

You can feel the thunder of its giant feet on the ground. You are fifty feet to the far treeline. Forty feet.

You can hear it behind you.

Thirty feet.

It swipes at the air behind your head.

Twenty feet.

It swipes again and connects sharp and hot against your shoulder and your fly sideways. You land hard in the mud.



Portland is a river city. I can just tell the moment the landing gear hits.

River cities always have a chip on their shoulder about being second class places. Neither the beginning nor the end of a journey. So they try hard and they resent that they have to. They compensate usually by offering good public transit and getting fancy about small things; beer or cheesesteaks, or bike lanes.

New York and Los Angeles have never given a shit about whether or not anyone likes them; they are utterly essential and know it.

New Orleans is the perfect port city, either the first or last stop on a very long trip to elsewhere. That's why it is how it is: America's Shanghai, and it revels in the fact.

Hannibal, Missouri is a river city. That's why it made Mark Twain.

St. Louis is a river city too, but the arch doesn't go over the river, it memorializes America's expansion from east to west along the horizontal axis. This is an attempt to de-emphasize the fact that St. Louis is a city that owes its entire existence to the vertical axis of the Mississippi River. So this attempt has proven unsuccessful.

Chicago will always be America's third city because it looks out at a body of water stretching beyond the horizon and seems content with the fact that this water is not endless. Chicago does not oversee an ocean. This country claims two oceans and Chicago sits on neither of them.

Technically speaking, New York is actually a river city too, or at least Manhattan is. Worse, the Hudson River is actually only a tidal estuary and the New York-New Jersey Bight is neither a bay nor a sea. But Queens butts up to Long Island Sound and Brooklyn arguably sits within licking distance of the Atlantic Ocean proper. Plus, New York - like London before it - has long since stopped concerning itself with geography or

context. The sun at the center of our solar system burns too brightly for it to bother pondering the size of other solar systems that it cannot see.

So the landing gear hits and suddenly I have a slightly better sense of things.

“Oh,” I almost say to the high school kid in the center seat of my aisle, “this is starting to make a lot more sense now. I feel like I’m both someplace and no place all at the same time.”

“Don’t be such a pretentious coastal-elite prick,” the high school kid would have said, “We were ranked #5 on Forbes’ ‘Coolest Cities’ list, 2017.”

I end up developing very contentious hypothetical relationships with the people sitting nearest me in the plane. “I’m just saying, I would never try to rob a bank in Burbank because it would be on live chopper-cam TV and the whole world would know about it instantaneously, but *here*, I feel like I could totally hijack a plane and get away with it. Because who gives a shit about a plane flying from Portland to Seattle? It’s 30 minutes, the people *on* the plane would barely care. And what’s the worst that could happen? They don’t get rained on for an extra two hours?”

“You are,” the kid might have said, “guilty of a nonsensical sort of narcissistic cultural elitism that I don’t really even know what to say about.”

“That sounds right. You’re very perceptive for someone who is *from* here.”

“Whatever, asshole.” But then, turning back from the overhead bin, the kid - out of a sense of hometown obligation - would’ve said, “Oh, but by the way: welcome to Portland. We have 9 bridges and thirty-six hundred microbreweries. Voodoo Donuts is cash only. Be sure to try the Cajun tots at McMenamins, they’re the best of us. And stop being such an asshole. We’re relentlessly unironic here.”



I stand in the center of the airport watching the escalators and think: this is where he stood.

But I know that's not true because Portland airport was extensively renovated in the 1980s and that old airport doesn't exist anymore. The way the Dome of the Rock was built on top of the Roman temple *Jupiter Capitolinus* which was built on top of the Second Jewish Temple which was built on top of Solomon's Temple. D. B.'s airport is long gone or buried beneath me.

But still, it was here, more or less. I'm in the right place within an acceptable margin of error. If the margin of error is around 50 years, then he and I have practically oscillated into mutual existence.

Cooper jumped in November 1971 and Mount St. Helens - fifty miles northeast of me here - exploded in May 1980, redistributing three million 900 thousand cubic yards of its own north face and more than 1 and a half million tons of sulfur dioxide up into the sky, all of which rained down like the burning gray end of the world for more than nine hours. When it was all over Mount St. Helens was 1,300 feet shorter than it had been the day before and the surrounding 300 square miles of mountains and forests were remade by layers of soil, ash, and fire.

More than 40,000 years of intermittent volcanic activity culminated in an eruption which remade the land in such a way as to bury or forever hide any and all remaining D.B. Cooper evidence on the ground only 9 years after he'd jumped. On the timescale of geologic history, that is a bullseye. Even the million-year tectonic rhythms of the planet Earth itself had helped to make Cooper un-capturable. What more can we ask of a folk hero?

I rent a little gray car at the airport and head north over a bridge spanning the Columbia River into Vancouver, Washington, very much a river city too, but less so. There is a D. B. Cooper escape room here. I'd read about it in one of the Cooper forums on DropZone.com.

Escape rooms became a thing became, I guess, people were just that fucking bored out of their minds by being alive. Your team gets locked in a room and the timer starts. The room is themed - Dracula, torture chamber, Titanic, whatever - and you get out of the room by solving a series of interrelated puzzles. It is the live action version of an Agatha Christie novel: *Ten Little Indians*, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd Interactive*, etc.

This one is in a strip mall and the strip mall has southwestern style adobe arches framing the double glass doors of each storefront and that's just out of place, right? Here where trees grow without anybody's attention?

Inside, since I'm only one person, I get teamed up with a group of six Norwegian tourists. Two women and four men, they look exactly like you think they do: fit, young, wearing Arc'teryx down jackets and carrying Osprey daypacks, but wearing shorts. They all seem to already have figured out that from Zion National Park to Disneyland, all of America is a theme park. An entire continental plate of make-believe.

We get ushered into the room - me and the Norwegians - and, to my disappointment, the room is the interior of a log cabin, not the interior of a Boeing 727-100. The expositional voiceover plays through speakers in the ceiling, "*November 1971, I bought a plane ticket from Portland to Seattle. Shortly after takeoff I skyjacked that plane with a briefcase bomb.*"

I roll my eyes because I already can tell that by leaving out the particular date - 24 November - the people who wrote the script for this room were not concerned with the particulars.

And I don't like the way he emphasized "briefcase bomb," like he should get credit for basic alliteration. Because first of all, it was an *attache* and secondly, Cooper wasn't an alliteration guy.

The exposition goes on to *explain* how D. B. Cooper parachuted into the forests of southern Washington and then made his way to his own log cabin - this cabin that I am now locked into with a half dozen Norwegians - and how the money is in this room with us and we need to find it before he comes back. Or whathellever.

I sit down on the saggy green couch in the middle of the room. A "replica" of Cooper's bomb sits on the coffee table in front of me, but the replica is just all wrong. First of all, it's in some weirdly square hard-sided bullshitty 1985 Samsonite briefcase with silver trim that is not like anything any of the witnesses ever described. The quote/unquote "bomb" is a single gray canister on the bottom side of the case, and there's a little wooden box next to it that probably holds clues for Norwegians, but nothing like a period detonator or mercury trigger. And there is an analog 16-keypad in the middle of the open case, which is just absolutely *not* what Florence Schaffner described. Nothing inside the damn case is even *red*. Nothing.

"Where do you think we should start?" one of the Norwegian women asks me, the blonde-er of them, trying to be friendly and inclusive. Socialist.

"I don't even think it matters a fucking bit," I say, all Nietzschean.

An attaché case, by the way, is different than a briefcase. It is thinner, usually softer - leather not plastic - it is old-school, and has a flap over the top. It is not just a fucking portable cargo box of the type that became trendy when Reagan was President. Richard Nixon was President when the plane got hijacked and he'd been Vice President when Eisenhower was President and similarly the best way to understand the 1970s is as a deranged revenge fever dream of the 1950s.

If men's neckties narrowed from 1945 to 1969 - culminating in the skinny London neckties of the Punk scene - they exploded again by 1970, becoming ostentatiously wide. The lapels of mens' blazers in 1970 - and the shoulder pads - we extravagant Marie Antoinette-ish over-reactions to the equalizing 1960s effects of blue jeans and bralessness. When DB Cooper got on the plane in 1971 - in a slim dark suit, white shirt, and skinny tie - he was both out of fashion in a Salvation Army thrift store kind of way and also simultaneously too square for the hippies. Literally no one else would have been dressed that way.

"Vhat vas the date?!" The blonde-er Norwegian hollers back to her group, her long pale fingers hovering over the 16-keypad in the fake briefcase. The others are studying a fake calendar on the fake wall of the fake cabin.

I say, "Eleven-twenty-four-seventy-one." They're not from here and so they do dates weird.

She looks at me like a poacher because this is the first thing I have contributed. She looks to her group and they all shrug like people who grew up with guaranteed government sponsored health insurance and so are therefore less concerned about instant death than I am.

By the way, I've been drinking this whole time, did I mention that?

The Norwegians all collectively, silently, and motionlessly agree.

She punches in the code: 112471

The door we entered through slides open.

We have won.

They jump up and down and celebrate. The less blonde one hugs me.

We have succeeded by solving a fake problem in a fake room based on what might have been true forty years ago the night a man with no particular name leapt from a plane into a very real thunderstorm which rendered his survival questionable.

In the parking lot the Norwegians all pile into a white rented van and they do not ask me to come with them.

I get in my rental car and I click my phone and ask, "What is the fucking point of any of this?"

And after thinking it replies, "Your language!"

Without clicking it again I say, "Fuck you, phone."

Portland is a river city and so I drive back across the bridge over the river and down to Downtown where the city really meets the river in a wide open green park that used to be - in the 1970s - where a freeway was.

I park in a garage and I wander around Downtown. I like downtowns because downtown is almost always where the city started and so it means that it's the most likely to look like it did then.

I sit by the river and watch barges go by. Its gray out and raining a little and if I squint I can make it look like 1971 because in the rain everything always looks like the past.

I watch a runner trying to burn off the baby weight push one of those jogging strollers along the riverfront walking path. She pauses to catch her breath and leans around into the stroller. Infant humans always make me think of baby kangaroos, hairless and useless to the world. Warm and skinny tucked into their little pouch. Existent and alive, but not yet creatures ready for this world. Pink, soft, and too tender yet to be real.

Sitting on the steps in this open little plaza overlooking the river, the Hawthorne Bridge is just off to my right. It's a tall steel truss bridge with two skeletal towers that can lift its center span up and down on a series of giant cables so ships can pass underneath. It was completed in 1910 and looks like it. It has that steampunk quality of something that long ago represented the very pinnacle of ingenuity, but now just seems quiet and primitive. Large lizards are like this about evolution.

Under the bridge on the other side of the river I can see the fat black whale shape of the retired submarine docked at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. The USS Blueback (SS-581) is a diesel-electric that launched from shipyards in Mississippi in 1959 and spent most of the 60s moving back and forth across the Pacific Ocean to the South China Sea. She spent most of 1970 submerged off the coast of Vietnam. She was involved in at least two special operations while she was there. Navy SEALs are trained to swim out through the forward hatch of submerged submarines. They SCUBA to the surface and inflate their rubber Zodiac boats and motor to shore.

Thanksgiving 1971 she was docked in Yokosuka, Japan.

Like commercial aircraft, the inside of a submarine is cramped. The hallways are not much wider than an average man's shoulders. Some of the sleeping bunks are in the forward torpedo room. Generations of young men fell asleep just feet above high explosive warheads. If the Cold War had ever turned hot, it would have meant for these men more legroom. Anything can become normal if you live it enough. Even jumping out of airplanes or being alone.

I wander away from the river into the city. Up Yamhill Street a little ways, tucked in along the light rail train tracks I find a hole in the wall dive bar barely a room big. The walls covered in inches of band stickers and fading graffiti. I order a bourbon and water and ask the bartender how long this place has been here.

"Since about forever," she says, and I watch the tattoos on her arms as she makes my change.

So I drink his drink as I sit on the bar stool and I think, this could have been his bar stool. And I think I want to scrawl something on the back of a cocktail napkin. Something about airspeed and flap settings, like I'm planning a heist, but I can't because I don't actually know how to do that. There are game day players and there are people who watch on TV. And I'm never going to find him because I'm an abstractionist. About skyjacking, about parachuting, about fatherhood. George Plimpton playing for the Lions is as close as I'll ever be able to get to Cooper.

Because the jump is the thing, but the jump is not the only thing.

Anyone can jump out of an airplane. It's not really even a jump. It doesn't even require bravery, just leaning too far in the proper direction. But to hatch a plan. To say, I

will jump. To be able to depend on one's own fortitude to do the thing when the time comes to do it.

Antarctic exploration killed a lot of people, none of whom planned to die, but all of them had to have known they might.

"Hey," I say to the bartendress when she brings me another drink, "have you ever heard of D.B. Cooper?"

She presses her lips together and screws up her face a little, "He was the bank robber, or pilot, or something right? Yeah, he was my old boyfriend's dad."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Or he said he was anyway, but he was kind of crazy."

"Are you from here?"

"Naw. Amboy, Washington."

I know Amboy. "That's south of Lake Merwin, right?"

"Yeah," she's studying me closer now. "Why?"

"In 2009 a farmer found a 34 foot parachute buried on his land in Amboy. He thought it was D.B. Cooper's."

"Was it?"

"No."

"Says who?"

"The FBI."

"Oh," she says, "*them*."

Just to be sure, the FBI called up Earl Cossey who was the guy who packed the parachutes Cooper had been given. "Nope," Cossey was reported to have said, "this is



silk. Cooper's were all nylon." Four years later in 2013, Earl Cossey's body was found in his own garage in Woodinville, Washington. Killed by a blunt-force trauma to the head. Several days after he was found, his wife received an envelope with no return address. Inside the envelope was Cossey's driver's license, credit cards, and a casino gambling card. The murder has yet to be solved.

As with everything, there is dispute. Cossey is not the only person who claimed to have been the one to pack the parachutes that day in 1971. In fact, the man running Flight Operations for Northwest Orient Airlines in Seattle that night says that he got the parachutes from Barry Halstead who worked for Pacific Aviation over at Boeing Field and he said that he got two of the chutes from a guy named Linn Emerick who worked at Seattle Sky Sports and the other two from a man named Norman Hayden who lived in Renton, Washington. All of these people said that Cossey hadn't been involved at all that night even though Cossey worked with Emerick at Seattle Sky Sports.

So who the fuck knows anything.

The bartendress slides back over to me after cracking open PBR tallboys for a couple of homeless guys at the other end of the bar. "So whose parachute was it?"

"Floyd Walling's."

"Who's he?"

"He was a Marine lieutenant who crashed his Corsair over Washington in 1945."

"Did he die?"

"Nope. He hit bad weather and had to bail out. He landed in the middle of the forest in the middle of the night in the middle of a winter storm. He made a fire to stay

warm and the next day he followed a creek for about nine miles until he finally walked out of the woods and into Yale, Washington.”

“That’s like ten miles from where I grew up!”

I raise my glass a little as if to toast to that.

“Hey,” she leans in to whisper a secret to me, “I don’t think my ex-boyfriend’s dad was actually D.B. Cooper.”

“Or maybe that’s just what he *wants* you to think.”

She winks at me and then drifts over to check on the homeless guys.

I finish my drink because the rain is letting up outside. I wander back out into the city.

Just outside the bar the tracks for the MAX train are sunk down into the old gray cobblestones of the street. I have nowhere to go, so I just follow the tracks and the brick sidewalks. Air Force and Navy pilots joke that when they get lost they should never follow train tracks because Marine pilots aren’t trained to navigate, they’re trained to follow train tracks.

I walk up past the Apple store at Yamhill and 4th, a beautiful tomb of glass and marble and then up the hill past the oblong sidewalk pool fountains decorated with bronze animal sculptures. Bear cubs and deer and little standing otters, their noses rubbed golden by the countless touches of people walking by. Funny how affection can destroy a thing so slowly.

My phone buzzes in my pocket and I look at the message from my ex: *Where r u?*

*Portland.*

*What the hell are you doing in Portland?*

*Research. Sorta.*

*Your boss called me. I guess I'm still your emergency contact.*

*You're also still my life insurance beneficiary.*

I wander up another block to the Courthouse Square. It's a big brick public plaza that's wide open and low on the east side and then stairsteps up in small elegant brick curves at the west side. It's wide enough that from the air one would be able to see it between the thicket of surrounding buildings. A not even that great parachutist would be able to make a clean landing here.

In 1971 this was still just a 40,000 square foot parking lot, an ugly double deck concrete garage. In 1969 the Meier and Frank Department store that owned the land wanted to expand the garage to 11 stories. The Portland City Council wanted to turn the space into a public park. There was a petition circulated by opponents. The petition was titled: *A Petition to Discourage the Influx of Hippies to Our City*. Public spaces, the argument went, invited communalism and therefore Communism. The petition was primarily concern with "sex bums, punks, pushers, and rabble-rousers."

I think that sounds like a good time, but then I guess I'm a sex bum.

I contain much information because in the absence of any certainties, I find comfort in quantities.

Willard Martin, who led the team that ended up designing this place tried to sell the city on his idea of a giant public space by literally painting his design onto the concrete of the parking lot. Imagine what that must have been like, to stand on the open flat second story of a parking garage slated for demolition while delicately walking on and between the painted lines of the design that would later be the reality of that place.

Imagine that in your own temporal reality you are stepping from parking spot to parking spot, but as your feet move from painted future stair step to painted future stair step, you can turn back and look back from what will one day be an elevated position and while what will one day be below you is now still level with you, you can nearly see the future below you imagined in the curving stair step lines of paint. And then five years later you can stand in the exact same physical place at the top of the now real steps and look down at the reality of the place below you and remember just the flat paint on flat concrete at your feet and it would be as if both of those places had always existed together simultaneously, because in that moment they exist both around you and inside of you.

Another buzz from my phone: *Would you please call your boss and let them know you're alive?*

*Sure.*

*What's going on with you?*

I wander vaguely south.

While the hijacking was underway SeaTac began routing other incoming flights away to other airports or into holding patterns. There is no American aviation equivalent to the UK's *train-spotting*, but any contentious amateur astronomer would have noticed that night that the damp airspace above Seattle was positively blinking bright with airplanes circling in unusual ways. There's a possibly apocryphal story that one of those other airline pilots placated his passengers with free drinks and by tuning his plane's intercom over to the comlink between Seattle and Flight 305, allowing them to listen in on the skyjacking in real time. They floated there in the sky over the snowy eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains sucking back booze, lighting cigarettes, chuckling to

each other, making the best of it, making love in the bathrooms, and listening as if to a radio play, while Cooper and his hostages - who did not yet know they were hostages - hovered over Puget Sound. Below Flight 305, every available fireboat between Seattle and Victoria, B.C. had been called up and was bobbing in the dark waters near Port Townsend, Washington, just in case the bomb was detonated in the air, or if the plane had to ditch unexpectedly. An impromptu armada of busy little boats blinking their running lights bright and fast because just their proximity to one another in the dark was a kind of danger.

I reply to my ex: *I'm going through a little bit of a thing.*

I walk south past a McDonald's and then a fancy underground fondue place. I walk through the shadow of a giant fenestrated square tower of white marble. The Wells Fargo Center is the tallest building in the state and was once described as "huge and sleek and featureless" which it is. The banking museum in the lobby has a vintage Concord stagecoach that used to roll on the Butterfield-Overland route in the 19th century before railroads opened up the West. As late as 1856 railroads dead-ended at the Mississippi River. Wells Fargo used to be able to deliver Atlantic-to-Pacific money and mail services (via Texas, Los Angeles, then San Francisco) in less than 25 days. Old West lightspeed. Stagecoach drivers, called "shotgun messengers" - because they delivered messages and also carried shotguns - were known for their full three-piece buffalo suits; pants, coat, and robe made of furry buffalo hide. In the mountains of Oregon or Idaho, Jesse James was less a danger than the cold.

And something about all that seems right because I see people here on bicycles riding through rain in very specialized Northface jackets and all that means is that buffalo

suits have gotten better. The past lives here a little nearer than it does elsewhere.

Probably it really is the weather. The life cycle of a raindrop is profoundly cyclical. A flake of snow falling slow from ten thousand feet through clouds, through wind, through night, through branches of trees, and lands on the buffalo hairs of a shotgun messenger driving the narrow mountain trails up through northern California and it clings there until the next day crossing the open warm green and yellow grasslands in the Rogue Valley near Ashland. Then the daylight yellow sun does what it does and the molecular bonds inside the snowflake loosen allowing it to turn back to water, and then the afternoon sun hits its crescendo and the water thins out to vapor and rises with its own heat and rises until the sky collects it blue and cools it and it condenses tight again into droplets of liquid again and it begins to fall again and falling and fall and falling again it glances off the aft vertical stabilizer fin of a Boeing 727 at night and spirals wide, then spins into the roiling 900 degree jetwash of three Pratt & Whitney JT8D low-bypass turbofan engines incinerating the drop back into galactically hot vapor that hangs jittery in the black sky long after the jet has gone away. But then - as all things eventually do - it cools. Slowly it cools and condenses, drawing itself back together again until it is heavy enough and round enough again that it then commences again to falling again. It falls onto mountains, into trees, it freezes into snow, melting in the spring, trickling down into creeks, leading to rivers, leading to oceans, swirling in open sea currents where the unguarded sun heats it and breaks it and in an afternoon sucks actual tons of ocean water back up into the sky.

The average cloud weighs 1.1 million pounds.

It really is about weather here. Because there is history in it. There's information in it.

If there's any answer to what happened to Cooper it's in the memory of water, of the hail that pelted him when he jumped, of the rain that soaked him as he landed, of the river that may have carried his body out to sea. Of the sea whose patience and currents sluffed the skin from his bones and spread him molecule by molecule out across the entire world.

I write to my ex: *I liked the name Benjamin. But I also liked the name Martin. They both have built-in shorter versions.*

*Don't*, she writes back.

*For a girl I liked Claire or Sophie or Evelyn. I don't think those have built-in nicknames though. I guess Evelyn could be Eve, but Evelyn is so pretty why would you want to shorten it?*

It takes a while but then she writes back: *Stop.*

I've been walking without paying attention to anything but my feet and my phone. I end up at the upper edge of Keller Fountain. It's a small mountain range of squarish brutalist waterfall shapes and tidepools all dug into the side of a hill. There's a park up there on top, then the rivulets and pools of the fountains, then all the water spills over the edges and plummets twenty feet into a vaguely trapezoidal lagoon fifteen feet lower than the sidewalk, where I stand. It descends in steps like an amphitheater, but rock and water and instead of rising toward a stage, it stairsteps down into a stone bowl where flat square lily pads of concrete hover in stacks over the water. It is - by any standards of urban design - a magical fucking place. Portland is a whole city of pretty public spaces, but people actually choose to get married here. This place is that kind of beautiful.

When the fountain was dedicated in 1970 - a few weeks after violent anti-war protests on the nearby campus of Portland State University - city leaders stood down in the bowl and protesters - as a matter of course - massed up along the rim. Speeches. Jeering. But then the water was turned on for the first time. It flowed fast and clear over the rough-hewn concrete cliff edges and spilled down - 13,000 gallons a minute - into the lagoon. At which point the protesters, realizing that some things bureaucracies do are good, dropped their signs and tramped down the steps and into the water. A whole silly melee ensued. College student/protesters leaping down into the pools of the lagoon, splashing each other, flinging water up at the city council, at the mayor. And then Lawrence Halprin, the landscape architect who designed the place, waded down into the water in his suit and tie and let the hippies splash him. His thin white shirt sticking transparent to his joyous warm body. The greatest moment of his life. A moment when the political, the social, the historical, all collapsed into a singularity of joy, for just a few minutes.

If Cooper lived in Portland, he could have come here on summer afternoons when the place becomes a kind of public pool. Parents dip their feet in up in the tidepools at the top when their children splash around in the clear water, some of them peering cautiously out over the lip of the waterfalls.

I get up and wander up the hill for a while until I hit a long narrow beautiful city park that's exactly one block wide and stretches a dozen blocks through downtown. It's a gorgeous green place with a high canopy of trees and brick paths below. It is also a very public place, where dogs shit and homeless tent camps spring up near the bathrooms. There's a statue of Abraham Lincoln. There's a statue of Teddy Roosevelt. I wander for a



little while until the park crosses over Market Street and becomes the long central quad of Portland State University.

It's a pretty campus, a mishmash of 20th Century architecture and in 1980 a Geology professor here named Dr. Leonard Palmer got an unusual phone call. It was from the FBI.

In February that year an eight-year-old named Brian Ingram was camping with his family on a sandbar in the Columbia River, known by locals as Tena Bar. While Brian was digging out a hole for a firepit, his little hands turned over three bound stacks of old \$20 bills. The cotton-linen paper of the money was severely degraded - edges rounded, holes worn through them - but the rubber bands holding them together were still intact. The Ingram family called the police who called the FBI. After forensic examination, the FBI was able to identify many of the serial numbers on the bills. Every single one of them had been recorded as part of the Cooper ransom.

Tena Bar is in the Columbia River. The Columbia River flows down from British Columbia into eastern Washington until it meets the Snake River and then hooks dramatically west. It forms most of the border between Washington and Oregon. It runs west through The Dales. It runs west above Portland, where it meets the Willamette River which bisects the city into east and west. Then the Columbia turns northwest, up past Vancouver, Washington, up past St. Helens. Then it makes another westward correction and flows past Astoria, Oregon and out into the Pacific Ocean.

Tena Bar is north of Portland. It is north of Vancouver, Washington. It is south and west of the area around Merwin Dam where the FBI has always said Cooper would have landed. If Cooper had lost the money - through death or through accident - in

Merwin Lake, or if he had landed in the Lewis River (which connects Merwin Dam to the Columbia), then the money would have bobbed and floated down the Lewis River for more than 20 miles until the Lewis emptied out into the Columbia River and then the flow of the Columbia would have floated the stacks of ransom money north then west and finally out to sea. But Tena Bar is south of the confluence of those two rivers, south of all that.

There is no obvious logic which can place those three stacks of 1971 ransom money under a foot of sand at Tena Bar nine years later in 1980.

When the FBI called Leonard Palmer at Portland State University it was because he was a top figure in his field of river sedimentation in the Pacific Northwest. Palmer learned that a portion of the Columbia River had been dredged in 1974. He identified the depth of the dredge layer at Tena Bar and concluded that the money could not have been in that place prior to 1974. However, it was also determined that the rubber bands holding the stacks together would have disintegrated in about a year if exposed to the elements, so they could not have been floating or even sitting washed up on a sandbar for the years between 1971 and 1974. In fact it was the ultimate claim of the Palmer Report that the money had not been buried at Tena bar for much more than a year, perhaps two years at the most. Which means the money would have had to arrive there no earlier than 1978, a full seven years after Cooper disappeared.

There is a minority theory that Cooper landed in the Lewis River and drown due to the weight of the money. That his body washed into the Columbia River, the closed bank bag still attached to him, and that his parachute, dragging him along underwater like a sail, snagged on a slow spinning propeller of one of the tankers that move up and down

the Columbia River every day. The ship would have been headed upriver toward Portland. This would have dragged Cooper's body back south of Tena Bar. At some point his bank bag came open just enough to let three bundles of money slip out.

There is a different minority theory that perhaps an animal found the stacks wherever they landed and proceeded to bury them at Tena Bar.

There is also a minority theory that the FBI has always been wrong about the flightpath of the plane and/or about where/when Cooper jumped. Numerous re-imaginings of these particulars can explain how the money ended up at Tena Bar, but none can explain away the rubber bands.

There is a minority theory that Cooper survived and stashed the ransom until about 1978 when he - for some unexplained reason - learned that he could not spend the money (on account of the serial numbers having been recorded) and in a final act of giving the middle finger to the FBI, went about burying stacks of the money all over the Pacific Northwest. The only money that has been found, however, was at Tena Bar.

My own developing minority theory is that nothing matters or makes any sense.

That there is no universal theory of anything. That not all things are actually knowable. That the universe really is mostly dark matter and we will never successfully learn what that actually is. That the money ended up at Tena Bar because of course it did. Because that was the last place it should be. If it had ended up in India I think I would have been happier, because it couldn't have floated there across the Pacific, so at least we would have known that someone took it there. But since it ended up at Tena Bar, all we can know is that nothing we know is good enough. It is just like everything else about him: all we know is enough to be completely mystified.

Years later, the FBI gave some of the recovered money back to Brian Ingram, about \$3,000. He sold bills one by one on the internet and eventually made about \$37,000.

I wander off of campus and find a little McMenamin's pub. I go in because it has started to rain again. I order some Cajun tater tots because I don't know when I ate last.

I message my ex: *I think I'm going to fly to Seattle.*

She writes back: *Why?*

*Because I don't know where else to go.*

I eat and it makes me feel less hollow. It makes me feel less drunk.

I walk back to the parking garage. I drive back to the airport. I have one credit card that isn't maxed out and so I buy a ticket to Seattle. I sit at my gate and I look at my shoes on the carpet.

I'd always wanted something out of life, but I'd never quite been sure what. I've lived with this gnawing in my gut. Like there was something in me that wanted out. And then we were pregnant and for those few weeks that gnashing fight in me calmed. And then we weren't and I was sitting in a half empty apartment and the feeling was back but different. It was louder. It was angrier. But it didn't come all at once. It came bit by bit. It came slowly. It came so slowly that each day I thought I was fine because I wasn't that much worse than the day before.

My flight starts to board, so I get quietly in line.

I have a developing minority theory. Cooper looks out the aftstair at a sky made completely slate gray by 200 mile per hour sleet. He summons whatever he has left in him at that moment and he jumps. And he tumbles and he tumbles and suddenly the

dying becomes very real for him. He tumbles and he's freezing. And all he wants to do is not die. All he wants is for this moment to stop. And he manages to get his hand on the ripcord and he pulls it hard and the parachute explodes above him and the force of it stopping his freefall jerks the money bag open and all that cash bursts open into the sky all around him and he is drifting now slowly inside a giant cloud of fluttering green \$20 bills. They tumble and swirl all around him as he falls gently through them.

The plane takes off. I feel that second as the landing gear lifts off the tarmac and we are flying but only by an inch.

The nose of the plane lifts and we are up in the air. We are rising and rising and rising. For just these moments, I am exactly like him. Exactly where he was. There was a life behind him on the ground and he could not possibly have known what was ahead of him.

If all of time were to ultimately collapse and all moments existed side by side and duration ceased to be significant and all things were always happening, then Flight 305 is still circling somewhere over night dark Puget Sound, and somewhere still I'm a father for 12 uninterrupted consecutive weeks, and somehow somewhere I dress a little son for Halloween in a costume of a dark suit and parachute that drags behind him on the sidewalk as he walks from candy door to candy door and my ex isn't my ex and she touches the back of my neck with her fingertips just because she loves me, and somewhere Tina lights his cigarette and never stops lighting it because that moment just keeps happening, and somewhere he is always jumping into the sky and somewhere he is jumping and falling and falling and always falling and somewhere DB Cooper is forever

falling and as long as he is, I don't have to worry about him, or me or anyone. Maybe this story ends best by never ending.

I take out a pen and on the back of my boarding pass I begin to write down the only true things I know about D. B. Cooper.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>

Halfway up the cabin Florence stops in the aisle and whispers very softly to the very young stewardess you noticed when you were boarding. She whips her head quickly to look right at you while Florence continues to whisper. Her name is Tina Mucklow and she is pissed at you.

Florence continues up toward the cockpit, but Tina is marching toward you. She stands in the aisle with her hand on the seat in front of you. She is looking at you very intensely. You hope that she is admiring your cool dark glasses, but probably that is not it.

“Can I get you anything, *sir*?”

“A 7&7.”

Without saying anything, Tina moves away to the galley. A moment later she reappears with your drink. She holds it out to you and you take it. You hold a folded \$20 bill out to her, “Keep the change.”

“No tipping allowed.”

Tina, you can tell already, is the kind of woman Sarge used to call a *spitfire*. Sarge was big on his World War II trivia. You like her.

“Sit with me for a while.”

She doesn’t want to, but she does.

She sits there in hot silence while you sip your drink and it might just be the best drink you’ve ever had. You wonder absently if this makes you an asshole.

You want to ask her if she likes your sunglasses, but both of you are busy watching Florence talk to the third stewardess up by the cockpit door.

“What are they doing up there?” You ask.

“Flo is giving the note to Alice.”

“Who’s Alice?”

“She’s the first class stewardess. She’s the only one who’s supposed to talk to the cockpit.”

“That seems needlessly procedural.”

You both watch as Alice takes the note and knocks softly on the cockpit door before opening it and disappearing inside.

Even out of the corner of your eye you can see Tina chewing the inside of her cheek.

Finally she asks, “Do you have a grudge against the airline?”

“I don’t have a grudge against your airline, Miss, I just have a grudge.”

In the silence that follows, you drink your drink while Tina sits very still.<sup>68</sup>

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68

You try to explain yourself to Tina → pg 172

You try to flirt with Tina → pg 92



The smell inside the pelts is gamey, to say the least. The meat and organs have all been sliced away, but the smell lingers. Raw, spicy, and moldy all at once.

You're in the bottom. Amelia Earhart is up on your shoulders. She's heavier than she looks as you step very slowly, carefully, and awkwardly toward the gate of Fort Stevens. Through a small hole sliced in the Big Foot hide you can see that the gate is hanging open because apparently, as Jimmy Hoffa had explained to you, the Big Foots are lethal, but not very smart.

Your heel rolls a little on a rock you didn't see and you lose your balance for a second. Amelia kicks your chest with her heel and whisper-yells, "Can you be more careful?"

"Do you want a switch?" you whisper yell back.

"Stop talking," you hear Jimmy whisper-yell from inside the other hide where he is perched on Hale's shoulders with a snub-nosed revolver. Above you Amelia has a shotgun slung across her chest inside the suit.

As you approach, a Bigfoot appears at the open gate. Down on all fours like any other creature, but then it stands upright. It sniffs at the air as you step very slowly. It emits a low growl, which then gets higher in pitch. It sniffs the air again. You can feel the sweat pouring down your face, but hopefully the smell of the hides will camouflage it. The hides will hide me, you think.

The Bigfoot seems to relax as it takes a step closer.

You're now within a dozen feet.

*Here we go*, you say in your head.

Up on your shoulders, Amelia very slowly pokes the barrel of the shotgun out through a hole in the chest of the pelt.

The Bigfoot, curious, takes another step toward you.

The blast is furiously loud, like a clap of thunder inside your eardrums. The blast rips open the chest of the creature and it falls over backward.

You fall over backward too, the force knocking Amelia off your shoulders and you both go down inside the sweaty hot fur suit. You're grasping around, trying to find one of the holes in the back of the suit. Amelia kicks you in the chest as she struggles out.

You manage to stick your head through and you see another Bigfoot sprinting toward you. Then you hear the pistol blast, you look over and see Jimmy's arm sticking fully out of the chest of the other suit, blasting away with the revolver.

The rushing Bigfoot goes down and slides to a stop just next to you.

You wiggle out of your suit and get to your feet. You follow Amelia, who has fallen in behind Hale and Jimmy as they step further through the gate. Another step and you're all inside the fort.

All you have to protect yourself is a marine flare gun, because that's all that was left.

A growl to your left. You swivel and there's another one, claws up in the air ready to swipe. Amelia is on it with the shotgun. Another blast of fire and thunder and the Bigfoot goes over on its side, whimpering. Amelia steps toward it and fires again, ending it.

"You're a badass," you say to her.

"I'm Amelia Fucking Earnhart."

None of you see the one that leaps from the roof of a nearby barracks. It flies down through the air and tackles Hale and Jimmy, its big claws slashing down hard. You hear human screaming and more blasts from Jimmy's revolver.

The thrashing stops as the Bigfoot goes limp.

"Get them out of there," Amelia orders you while she surveys the surrounding area with the shotgun tight against her shoulder.

You push at the big dead Bigfoot body. You push and push and then it rolls to one side.

"Jimmy!" you shout, "Hale!"

Then you see the switchblade come stabbing through from the inside of the suit. Jimmy slits his way out and sits up. He's covered in blood.

"Did they get you?" you ask.

"Not me," he says.

Hale Boggs, in the lower half of the suit, isn't moving. Jimmy slices the suit open down to the crotch. Hale is dead, four giant claw gashes from his chest up across his face.

"He was good man," Jimmy says.

"Did he ever tell you who actually killed JFK?" you ask.

"Yeah," Jimmy answers, "but I already knew.

"Let's go," Amelia says.

You sneak your way down toward the docks. Cautious. Only four or five of the creatures were living here. Three of them are already dead. The other might not even be here, could be out hunting.

Dusk is beginning to settle. The sun just setting out there in the ocean. Soon the Japanese submarine will be surfacing.

The three of you rush down the long wooden dock. There are old boats bobbing in the water. "Check those engines!" Jimmy yells.

You hop down into a rowboat with an outboard engine, you jerk hard at the starter rope. It sputters but doesn't catch. You look closer and grab the throttle. You turn it open and pull again, hard. It sputters.

"COOPER!" Amelia yells.

You turn and there is a Bigfoot on the dock behind you rearing up to its full height.<sup>69</sup>

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69

You remember the flare gun → pg 96  
You leap out of the boat → pg 121

Lately you have been thinking about those kids who got killed at Kent State last year.

You'd never even heard of Kent State.

Or Kent, Ohio.

Still couldn't even point to it on a map.

Kids protesting the widening war, kids protesting Nixon, protesting America right then. Kids who'd read *1984* in their English classes, who understood what Ike meant when he'd talked about a military-industrial complex. Then 29 Ohio National Guardsmen fired 67 rounds at them in 13 seconds. Killed 4 of them, wounded 9.

In Vietnam the kill ratio LBJ had demanded was 10 to 1. Ten of them for every one of ours. General Westmoreland's actual war plan had been to kill so many of theirs that eventually they would no longer be able to reinforce at a rate that matched their casualties. "War of attrition" Sarge said once, "is just a fancy way of saying murder rodeo. And I did not sign up to be a fucking clown at no murder rodeo."

At Kent State none of the Guardsmen had been killed or wounded, because the kids hadn't been armed.

4 to 0 is a kill ratio even better than 10 to 1. It would have been enviable in an only slightly different place.

You think a lot about that picture of Jeffrey Miller. That picture that won the Pulitzer Prize. Jeffery face down on the ground, dead as anything. A girl - 14 years old - Mary Ann Vecchino kneeling over him, screaming. Her arms bent upward in the universally understood gesture of *WHAT IN THE HOLY FUCK?!*

You've seen that gesture so many times.

Funny how it transcends culture, language, geography, history.

It is the gesture Florence would have made at you if she hadn't been scared out of her mind.<sup>70</sup>

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70

“I’m in a bit of a hurry,” you say, “so if you could just point me in the direction of the nearest road or bus station that would be great. Or maybe the nearest town with a Four Seasons, or a nice steak house, nothing too fancy, but you know the kind of place where the waiters wear vests.”

She doesn’t respond.

“A burger place would be fine too, I guess.”

You follow her into the treeline. It is very dark now, but you can still make out her tall, slim form ahead of you. She walks with the shotgun resting up on her shoulder pointing up. Finally she leads you onto a little trail and the going gets easier.

“So,” you say, “what’s a nice girl like you doing all the way out here?”

Nothing.

“Do you want to hear a joke? Richard Nixon, Sonny Bono, and Charlie Manson walk into a bar. Nixon orders a Coke, Sonny Bono orders a plate of cocaine, and Manson ...”

“I don’t know who those people are.”

“What? How is that possible? Nixon is the damn President.”

She turns back and looks at you. There is some moonlight streaming down through the trees and you can actually see her now. She’s maybe 40, short messy hair, a very pleasant face. Kind of familiar ... “Hey do I know you from someplace?”

“I’m Amelia Earhart.”

“That’s ridiculous!” You look away for a second to emphasize your incredulity and when you look back you see the flat end of the shotgun butt flying at your face and then you don’t see anything at all.<sup>71</sup>

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71



“It’s not about you or the airline. It’s about this whole damn county. There is a threat that is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. An erosion in our confidence in the future. A crisis of confidence in the meaning of our lives and the unity of our nation. I believed in America and it wasn’t a romantic dream. I don’t know if I do anymore. But I know that confidence in the future supported everything else. Confidence has defined our course and served as a link between generations. We’ve always believed in something called progress. We’ve always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own. But people are losing that faith, not only in our government, but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for *meaning*. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose. The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years.”

“So you’re hijacking a plane to give people hope?”

“There was a Depression-era bank robber named Willie Sutton and one time a reporter asked him why he robbed banks. You know what he said?”

“Because that’s where the money is.”

“That’s absolutely right. This country needs a new Jesse James.”

“Plus you get \$200,000 dollars out of the deal.”

“And this kind of thing keeps me from blowing my brains out. So, yeah.”

“You know,” Tina says, “I hate these new uniforms they make us wear. Too short.”

“The airline makes you wear them?”

“Yeah.”

“Well then fuck ’em.”

“*Yeah,*” she says, “fuck ’em.”<sup>72</sup>

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72

When you come to you're in another airplane. You're belted into an airplane seat. The cabin is relatively dark, but it is empty and you're alone. You can see a green glow out the window, but that's about it. The plane seems to be on the ground. Your head is aching. You realize your hands are tied to the seat.

"Hey!" you call, "I would like an aspirin!"

You hear movement up by the cockpit but you're belted in too tight to see it. You realize that the moneybag is no longer attached to your body. That is no good.

"HEY!"

You hear the cockpit door open and then you hear footsteps. You see a shape approaching you. "Where is my money?" you yell.

"People are always saying that to me," he says, leaning down over you. He's a beefy little man with small dark eyes, but in the green glow he looks a little bit familiar.

"Who the hell are you?"

"My name is James Riddle Hoffa, you can call me Jimmy." He extends his hand, which you can't shake and he knows it and it makes him chuckle. Then he calls over his shoulder, "Amelia, hit the lights."

There's a distant click and then a few of the cabin lights blink and flicker on. Jimmy sits down in the seat across the aisle from you as a man and woman approach from the cockpit.

You say to him, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"That is a very good question. In 1975 some friends of mine tried to throw me out of a plane over Lake Michigan. And they were largely successful. It was a nice clear summer day and so there I am, fallen' fallen' you know the drill. And then below me

there's this big green ... FLASH! And the next thing I know I'm standing here in the middle of the forest."

The man and woman are standing in the aisle near enough for you to see them.

"That," Jimmy says, pointing at the woman, "is Amelia Earhart, disappeared over the Pacific Ocean in 1937. And that," Jimmy points at the man, "is Louisiana Congressman Hale Boggs, disappeared in a plane over Alaska in 1972. And I also know who you are. You are that sum'bitch DB Cooper who hijacked that plane in ... what was it Hale? '71?"

"Yes it was," the big man says back.

"My name is *Dan*," you say.

"You know, Hale was on the Warren Commission," Jimmy says. "He knows all about mysteries."

"That's cool. Where's my money?"

"We've got it, but it won't do you much good here."

"Where exactly is *here*?" You ask.

Amelia answers, "It's a place worth getting away from."

"You showed up at a very lucky time," Jimmy says, "We had a fourth man, he's dead now, so now we need a fourth man. Are you in or are you out?"

"Of what?"

"We're escaping," Amelia says.

"I need more information," you say.

“We want to get out of here,” Jimmy says, “we need a fourth man to do that. That can be you, or it can be the next sorry bastard who shows up here. So are you in or are you out?”<sup>73</sup>

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73

“I’m in,” you say → pg 189

“I’m out,” you say → pg 83

The landing gear hits the tarmac in Seattle at 5:45 pm, 2 hours and 55 minutes after take-off. Via Tina, you tell the pilots to taxi to the far end of the runway, away from the terminal, but where it's still bright, so you can see all the approaches. You ask Tina to ask the passengers to lower the window shades because you know that the FBI has started hiring former Green Beret sharp shooters as snipers. You have the cabin lights turned down low.

From the far back of the cabin you hunker down low and open one of the window shades just a sliver. You watch a little truck with an airstair on back as it slowly approaches and docks with the forward door on the port side. You feel about ready to piss yourself.

You can see there's a man down there now standing next to the truck. He has lugged big parachutes out of the truck and he is holding what looks like a heavy bank bag, which is not a knapsack like you asked for, but fuck it.

You motion Tina to come over to you.

"Yeah."

"Open the door, go down the stairs. The man down there has a bank bag, bring it back up here. Do not let him come up. Do not let any of the passengers off. Go."

Your fingers are tingling from the inside as you watch Tina open the door.

You watch as she slowly descends the stairway. You feel a little lightheaded, but your feet are heavy. This is how you feel sometimes when you're drunk: feet rooted through the floor, the rest of you bending like a sapling battered around in a storm.

Tina gets to the bottom of the stairs and you can see her feet land on the tarmac. You see her turn toward the man with the bag. For a moment nothing happens and you think she's thinking about running.

Finally she says something. You can't hear what she says, but you see her reach her arms out for the bag. Your heart starts beating again.

Tina's coming back up the airstair.

You have never loved any woman this much in your life. Suddenly there is blood again in your chest and you can feel it pumping around. You feel warm and happy.

She comes back into the cabin and she's walking straight back toward you. The passengers are giving her *what-the-fuck-looks*, but she doesn't even care and neither do you at this point.

You're still watching out the window because if they're going to rush the plane, this is the moment.

"Here it is," Tina says.

"Open it. What's in it?"

"Money," she says, "a whole lot of money."

You tell Tina to get the parachutes and let the passengers off. You slip into the lavatory as the passengers are lining up to deplane. This is the safest moment to step away because the FBI won't shoot at them. You dig around in the bank bag. It's bound stacks of \$20 bills, maybe 100 stacks. That seems about right.

Back in the cabin you watch the fuel truck motor up to the starboard window.

"Tina," you call over to her, "tell the other stewardesses to get off with the passengers. And then order some food for you and the pilots."

You watch all of them shuffling slowly down the stairway. Those suckers are going to have a hell of a story to tell once someone explains to them they've been hostages all afternoon. They're all loaded up onto a waiting bus and driven away to the terminal.

This is nail biting time now.

You listen for the refueling to start, but aren't hearing anything.

Tina approaches, "The pilots are asking where you want to go, you know, once we take off."

"Mexico City," you say, "But get a piece of paper, I want you to write this down ..."

"Okay, hang on."

While Tina looks for a pen, you examine the parachutes.

"Okay," Tina says.

"Okay," you look up at her. "Once we take off I want the pilots to put us on Victor 23 south ..."

"What is that?"

"The pilots will know. Put us at 10,000 feet, not one foot higher, because I don't want them to pressurize the cabin. I want them to keep the landing gear down and locked. Once we're up there I want the flaps set at 15 degrees and tell them no faster than 200 knots."

"You know that's really slow, right?"

"You're damn right it is. Oh," you jerk your thumb over your shoulder, "and tell them I want to take off with the aftstair down."



“Excuse me?”

“Yeah, go tell them. And find out why I don’t hear fuel pumping. This should only take 30 minutes.”

While Tina hurries up to the cockpit you turn your attention to the parachutes. One of them is an old military straight-drop chute - a robust Nazi-killer chute - but can’t steer for shit, because why would you want a soldier to go anyplace but where you drop him?

The other one is civilian, probably a Pioneer. Steerable, but finicky. A bad chute if the weather and wind are bad and they looked bad coming in. Clouds thick enough that the windows occasionally just went gray.

The two front chutes look fine. All you need a reserve chute to do is open, because if you have to use the damn thing at all, you’re halfway to dead already. You don’t spend a lot of time studying them.

Instead you hold the bank bag in your hands. It’s about 25 pounds and it’s a goddamn *bank bag*. No loops, no clips, no handles.

Tina comes back, “The Pilot says the fuel truck says it has a vapor-lock problem.”

“That’s bullshit,” you snap at her, “it’s too cold outside for that. Tell them to get another truck over here and to stop screwing with me.”

This time Tina only goes up to the galley in the middle of the cabin. She picks up the air-phone to the cockpit and loudly repeats everything you just said while staring you down.

You pissed her off and you make a mental note to not piss off the one person on the entire planet who is helping you at all.

“Sorry,” you say when she comes back.

“The pilots say we can’t take off with the aftstair down.”

“Yes we can.”

“Well they say we can’t.”

“Please tell them that we can.” You consider saying, ‘I’ve seen it done, they do it all the time in Vietnam, but instead you just say, “I promise, it can be done.”’

As Tina struts back to the phone you grab one of the little front chutes and pull the ripcord. The big pink canopy squirts out down the length of the cabin. You fish a little pocket knife out of your raincoat and start slicing out sections of the cords.

Tina comes back, “The second fuel truck is here, but it’s having some problem too.”

Your feet are getting heavy again.

Tina says, “Don’t worry, the co-pilot chewed their asses out already. Another truck is on the way.”

You remind yourself not to take it out on Tina. It is not Tina’s fault the FBI is trying to buy time. But buy time for what?

“The guys up front said to thank you for the food, by the way.”

“Sure thing. You should eat too.”

“I will,” she says, “but there’s another thing.”

You stop harvesting cord and stand straight up, making a point of sighing very deeply, “What?”

“The pilots say they’re not comfortable attempting to takeoff with the aftstair down, but I’ll show you how to lower it once we’re in the air.”

“Fine,” you bend back down.

“Also ...”

You stand back up, “Sure, why not?”

“They want you to know that flying at 200 knots, at 10,000 feet, with 15 degree flaps, we’ll burn too much fuel to make it to Mexico City.”

You point at the pile of parachutes, “Tina, I don’t know how to be more clear about this, I am going to jump out of the plane. After that, they can land it anywhere on God’s green creation that they would like.”

“They say we can make it to Reno ...”

“Fine. Please ask the pilots to land the plane in Reno.”

“It’s the biggest little city in the world ...”

“Damn right.”

Tina moves back to the air-phone.

You take the cords you’ve cut and start trying to make some kind of harness for the bank bag. This is not the best idea you’ve ever had.

Tina calls to you from the galley, where she is on the phone, “So, funny story ...”

*“What? Now?”*

“The third fuel truck is working fine, but it was only half full to begin with.”

Too much. You drop the bag and the cord and scramble up to the galley. You grab the phone from her hand and before shouting, you take a very deep breath. In through your nose, out between your lips, you say calmly, “I want to get this show on the road!” Then you slam the phone down.

“Well those were the pilots, but I’m sure they’ll let the gas guys know you’re unhappy. Maybe you should consider lodging a complaint with management.”

“I’ll write a harshly worded letter.”

“That always works.”

You have a thought. You unzip the bank bag and pull out two stacks of bills. You hold them out to Tina, “For your troubles.”

She shakes her head a little and smiles a little, “No tipping allowed.”

She goes back to the phone and you stuff the money back.

You manage to tie a web of tight knots around the bank bag, with long loose ends of cord to secure it to your body. You wrap the extra length around the bag itself and then loop it around at the top to make a handle.

Tina calls to you, “The fourth truck is done. We’re refueled.”

“Then let’s get the hell out of here.”<sup>74</sup>

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74

## THE WOMAN

Robert Dayton was a Merchant Marine in the Pacific during World War II. His military file shows that following the war he was given a retroactive suspension for going AWOL in the Philippines in 1942. Dayton, however, told that story differently. He claimed that while on leave he went on a boar hunt in the deep jungles and became hopelessly lost. He was discovered by warriors from the Moro tribe and that he fought beside them against the Japanese army until he was eventually captured, which is how he'd ended up in a POW camp at the end of the war.

In 1945 the Merchant Marines still needed sailors and so the AWOL suspension was placed in Dayton's file, but he was allowed to return to work on the high seas.

Dayton had been born in 1926 and grown up in Long Beach, California. It had always been his dream to be a pilot, but his eyesight wasn't good enough for the Army-Air Force. Dayton also took to cross-dressing at a very young age. In later life, Dayton would claim that even while in the Merchant Marines, there were always a few pieces of women's clothing in his A-Bag. After the war Dayton eventually returned to the United States and found employment in the commercial construction industry, where he was trained to work with explosives. He tried several times to move into the airline industry and begin working as a pilot, but his eyesight continued to be a problem. There were many years when Dayton was a bit wayward. For awhile he worked as a prospector, also a day laborer, a fisherman. He married a woman, then divorced. He married another one then divorced again. Money was always tight and he frequently told his friends that he was planning to rob a bank.

In 1969 Robert Dayton underwent sex reassignment surgery (SRS) at Seattle University Hospital. Barbara Dayton was initially unhappy with the results of the surgery and had to undergo several more. Hospital staff have recalled that Barbara was always having trouble coming up with the money she needed, but then in 1971, at a consultation two weeks after the D.B. Cooper hijacking, Barbara seemed suddenly at ease about the costs. Her doctor's notes from the December 7, 1971 evaluation say that the patient, "is on welfare, but is strangely unworried despite inability to get work."

Eventually Barbara settled into a job as a librarian at the University of Washington.

At Thun Airfield in Puyallup, Washington south of Seattle, a married couple named Rob and Pat Foreman met Barbara Dayton in 1977. They both owned Cessna-140s and struck up a friendship. They all flew together on the weekends. Over 20 years of friendship, the Foremans were impressed by Barbara, by her stories, by her animated telling of them, and by the wide swath of experiences she'd had living as a man and then a woman.

Once, over a quiet afternoon coffee in 1979, Barbara told them of her most secret experience: that two years after the surgery, she bought a man's suit, slicked back her thinning hair, put on a pair of sunglasses, became Dan Cooper, and hijacked Flight 305. Over coffee that day, Pat Foreman tenderly took the wig off of Barbara's head, combed back her old friend's hair, put a pair of glasses on her face, and compared Barbara to the old newspaper sketch of Cooper. The likeness, she said, was shocking.

For months after that Barbara was quite open with the regulars at Thurn Airfield about her crime, until she learned that while the statute of limitations on Cooper was

supposed to have run out in 1976, the FBI had succeeded in very quietly getting a John Doe Indictment, keeping the case open indefinitely. By 1980 Barbara had recanted to anyone who would listen. She died of pulmonary disease in 2002. Her friends the Foremans however never forgot her D. B. Cooper claim and in the years after her death set about proving some of the old stories they'd so enjoyed listening to Barbara tell over the years. And the striking thing is that so far they have been able to. The boar hunt in the Philippines, the Moro tribesmen, the POW camp. Everything. They just haven't been able to prove the Cooper story yet. They've written a book about Barbara and they spoke at the 2011 D. B. Cooper Symposium in Portland, Oregon. They haven't stopped looking yet, even though the FBI has. The investigation was closed in 2016.<sup>75</sup>

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75

I don't think she was DB. Take me back to the suspects → pg 46  
I bet she was DB, it all makes sense now! Tell me about her jump → pg 41

You filled out the ticket by writing in big block letters: *DAN COOPER*.

You study the letters for just a moment and ask yourself if they look sufficiently different from your own handwriting. They do. You hand the ticket back and that is that. There is no security line and no metal detectors. You walk right over to your gate, because it is 1971 and any person who wants to can walk right up to any gate in any airport in America. Entire families can go to the airport with Dad to see him off on his business trip. Entire families can sit in the waiting area with him. He can bounce his little child on his knee while chatting with his wife about any old thing, then when it is time to board, the whole family can stand there at the window and watch Dad put his hat on and walk through the rain on the tarmac and up the roll away air stairs and into the plane. Once Dad takes his window seat he can wave back to Mom and the smiling kids. Because it is 1971 and that is how air travel works.

The airport is busy because it is the day before Thanksgiving, but you find a relatively quiet spot off by yourself in the corner of the waiting area. You try to look like you are absently admiring the sights and sounds of the airport, but really behind those dark glasses you are taking stock of the 35 other passengers in your waiting area. Mostly dour looking businessmen like yourself but none with glasses as cool as yours. A completely bald guy, a college age kid, a short man in a black cowboy hat. A woman in a white jacket. Lots of men in wide neckties, as was becoming the fashion, which you aren't happy about.

A lot of little things like that had been changing lately.

Only about half the men waiting here are even wearing proper hats.



The Northwest Orient Airlines stewardesses you see rushing about are wearing red uniforms with skirts so short they nearly infringe on common decency, though you don't really mind that so much, but the outfits remind you of the get-ups in that terrible space TV show that got canceled a few years ago. What was it called? *Star* something. With those terrible actors, none of whom will ever amount to anything, you're certain. Why did they even make such a dumb show about space travel while at the very same time we were racing the Soviets to the moon? You were happy that it went off the air a month before Lieutenant Neil Armstrong stepped out on the surface of the moon. It would have been a mockery otherwise. The real world, you've always believed, is far more interesting than any myth.

It is about 2:30 and they have started boarding for your flight.

You hang back as the other passengers exit the gate and walk through the rain to the airstair pressed up alongside Flight 305's forward boarding door. You'd hoped that they'd board you up the aftstair so you could get a closer look at it. You wait, hoping that perhaps the passengers would be split into two groups, with some of you boarding in back, but no luck, there aren't enough of you for that.

You're the last passenger to begin climbing the airstairs. At the top you pause in the rain and look back at the airport, at the city of Portland painted with the gray smear of afternoon light. It makes you think of something odd.<sup>76</sup>

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76

What are you thinking of?

Vampires → pg 192

Cambodia → pg 119

*Fiddler on the Roof* → pg 124

“I’m in, of course. What am I going to do, *not* say yes?”

Jimmy stands up and pulls a switchblade from his suit pocket. He flicks it open, a little closer to your face than you would have liked, then he cuts the rope around your wrists.

“Thanks,” you rub your wrists, “so what’s the plan?”

They lead you out of the plane. They have a makeshift rope ladder hanging out of the forward doorway. You climb down and look around. The sky has cleared and there’s a flat green hole hovering above you. It roils and sizzles a little. You watch as something comes tumbling down out of it. A satellite? Small and metallic and blinking. It falls down through the hole and plummets toward the ground. It lands atop a giant pile of old airplanes, a tugboat, a crushed helicopter. The satellite bangs and rolls down the pile until it comes to rest on the ground.

“What the hell is all that?” You ask.

“Junk falls out of it all the time,” Amelia answers.

“Are there more people?”

“Not usually.”

“Where do they go?” You ask.

She gives you a look, as if to say, *How the hell should I know?*

Jimmy leads group over to a dented shipping container that looks like it fell from the sky. You can still see the grooves in the ground from where they’d dragged it away from the pile of junk.

“Who was you fourth man?” You ask Amelia, suddenly concerned about your predecessor.

“Fred Noonan, my navigator.”

“What happened to him?” you ask.

Then Jimmy and Hale pull open the big doors of the container and hanging inside there are two giant animal pelts. As big as bear. Bigger even.

You step closer. “Is that ...”

“Big Foot,” Jimmy says.

“I don’t understand.” You study the giant hairy bodies, hanging limply like empty deflated buffalos.

“We managed to kill two of them,” Jimmy says, “and gutted them clean.”

Hale is standing next to you now, towering over you, “he’s the plan. Fort Stevens is not far from here. You ever heard of Fort Stevens?”

“No.”

“It’s the only place in the lower 48 that the Japanese bombed during World War II. A submarine hit it with mortar rounds”

“Okay?”

“Well, for some reason that’s still going on. It happens every night. And on the deck of that submarine there’s a little seaplane. A spotter plane.”

“On a submarine?”

“Yeah,” Hale says, “that used to be common because back then subs stayed on the surface most of the time. Anyway, so we’re going to get into Fort Stevens where there are boats and guns, we’re going to use the rafts to get on the submarine, then we’re going to steal the plane and fly it back through the hole in the sky.”

“That’s the plan?”

“Yep,” Hale says.

“And what are those for?” You point at the giants pelts.

“Fort Stevens,” Jimmy says, turning toward you and lighting one of your cigarettes, which apparently he has, “is now home to a family of Big Fooths.”

“Big Fooths?” you ask.

“Yes.”

“Big Feet, maybe?”

“What?”

“Big *Feets*, I guess.”

“Would you take this seriously?” Jimmy Hoffa says to you.

“Can I have my smokes back?”

He tosses them to you.

“And my lighter?”

He tosses the Zippo to you.

You pull a Raleigh out of the pack and light it. You take a big deep drag.

“So,” you say, “we’re going to dress up like Big Feet to get inside the ghost fort to steal boats to attack the ghost submarine to steal the plane to fly away through the interdimensional portal?”

“That’s about the size of it,” Jimmy says.

“And what happened to Fred?”

“He got eaten,” Amelia says.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>

For some reason you think back on how you never really read much of anything until you got stationed overseas. One day you were sitting on your cot watching flakes of dust slowly fall through a moat of sunlight when Sarge walked by and bellowed, “What are you even doing right now?”

And you said, “Thinking about floating.”

Then Sarge grabbed the nearest thing, which happened to be a book, and threw it at your head. “Contrary to common opinion around here, I do not think you are an idiot. It is about time you start proving me right. Read that damn thing and report back to me.”

And so you did.

There was so much loneliness back then, so much downtime, so much fear and need and desire to let your brain be somewhere else, that you started reading whatever you could get ahold of and how one of those books was something about vampires and how it said that a vampire can’t come into your house unless you invite it in and you remember thinking at the time, “Well just don’t ever invite a vampire into your house.” That might have been the first time that it ever occurred to you that all problems are solvable and that all questions have answers. Sometimes those answers are so simple that they can look - to a world that has gone out of its mind with a chaos caused by the belief that complexity is a patriotic virtue on par with success - utterly insane.

Then you turn back and board the plane.<sup>78</sup>

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78

Go to → pg 134

There is not a sound.

You don't hear rain.

You don't hear your heart.

You don't hear the distant sound of jets in the sky above you.

You pull your legs up. You pull your body into a tight fetal ball.

You peek out the corner of your eye. It happens almost in slow motion. The giant claw hand coming down at you.

You just barely hear the wet crack sound as it crunches your skull. You just barely feel the high pitched pain in your face. You are still alive as it starts to drag your body through the mud to the treeline.

You manage to get your eyes to close.

You don't feel anything now.

You are gone.

I'd just started working at the library and I was still living with my ex, but this was before she was my ex.

We used to do this thing where I would read to her at night. She always had trouble getting to sleep, so I would bring home really boring books. We'd turn out every light in the apartment and crawl into bed. She'd fold her body into mine and I'd read to her using just a very small reading light. I used to think about what that must have looked like. Just the book and our bodies inside that pale bubble of light, floating there in the dark of our bedroom. When her breathing softened out to a thin soft wave, I'd flip the light off.

One day, on the way out of work, I grabbed *Skyjack* by Geoffrey Gray. The cover is great, Cooper in his suit free falling through the sky toward the left side of the jacket, while the Flight 305 jets away toward the bottom of the book. A while ago at work I'd done the archive metadata on an article about D. B. Cooper that Gray had written for New York Magazine. The book grew out of that article.

"Who is D. B. Cooper?" My ex had asked that night.

"He skyjacked a plane in the 1970s and got away."

"Is that boring enough?"

"I can read it like it's boring," I said.

"Yeah, you can make anything boring."

At that point our relationship had less than a year left on it, but neither of us knew that then.

We settled into bed that night and as she was drifting off, I said very softly, "I could read a dozen books about this guy."

“Good,” she whispered, “then I can just sleep forever.”<sup>79</sup>

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79

That’s sweet, but now let’s talk about Cooper → pg 43

What happened to you two? → pg 31



I go back to my little apartment and I pour a drink and I stand there with my bare feet on the hardwood floor and the only light I have on is the one that lights up the topographical maps of Oregon and Washington that I've got tacked up on the wall. For the millionth time I study the bright red string as it ascends from Portland, up over the squiggly lines of the Cascade Mountains and then down into Seattle, loops around the head of a thumbtack and then travels southeast on flight path Vector 23. I don't have a map of Nevada, so the string just shoots off the maps and gets tacked directly onto a newspaper clipping from The Oregonian about microscopic titanium particles recently found during a recent re-test of his tie.

I've never understood why he left the tie behind. I've never been good at understanding how people abandon things that way.

I study the string again. I study the likely drop zones I've circled in marker.

As many times as I've look at all this, I've never noticed how frayed the string has gotten. Its tendrils unwinding slowly over time.

I look at Portland on the map. I've never been to Portland. How could I have never been to Portland? The only place on earth I can be sure that he actually spent a real amount of time. I need to smell the air. I need walk around where he did.

I need to be somewhere else. Portland is the only place that makes sense. I don't pack a bag, but I put on my one dark suit. I finish the drink and go.<sup>80</sup>

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80

Let's go to Portland → pg 138

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